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BY FATIMA SHAIK

Tale of Two Wars

THE WHITE HOUSE has hit on an ingenious way to win the war in Iraq. It is all laid out in a White House policy paper, "National Strategy for Victory in Iraq."

The strategy was conceived and written not by the nation's top military strategists but rather by Peter Feaver, an associate professor at Duke University whose field is public opinion and polling. Feaver, hired by the National Security Council earlier this year, is a co-author of "Casualty Sensitivity and the War in Iraq," a study that found, "When the public believes the mission will succeed, the public is willing to continue supporting the mission, even as costs mount. When the public thinks victory is not likely, even small costs will be highly corrosive."

In essence, the way to win the war is to declare "victory" as imminent. And that is what President George W. Bush has been doing as he tours the country promoting the "National Strategy for Victory in Iraq."

Consider this excerpt of Bush's speech on December 14 at the Wilson Center in Washington:

I've come to discuss an issue of vital importance to the American people, and that is: Victory in the war on terror. [W]e cannot—and will not—leave Iraq until victory is achieved. ... We will never back down, we will never give in, and we will never accept anything less than complete victory. ... we will not leave until victory has been achieved. ... We will carry on the fight, we will complete their mission, and we will win. ... victory will be achieved.

The "strategy for victory" is not aimed so much at the war in Iraq as the domestic war at home. That's because Bush needs to win in Iraq—or at least manage public perceptions of that increasingly costly war—to consolidate his victory in Washington.

On Capitol Hill, the Republican congressional leadership has been busily dividing the victor's spoils: billions of dollars tax cuts to GOP patrons; rollbacks in regulations; and defunding of government programs. The GOP's weapons of

choice: a phalanx of K-street lobbyists and rule changes to Congress.

Since 1998, according to the Center for Public Integrity, the lobbying industry has spent \$13 billion trying to influence national legislation by deploying an army of lobbyists that has included more than 200 former members of Congress and 42 former directors of federal agencies.

For many of these lobbyists, particularly those representing corporate interests, their job is made easier by changes in House rules that allow votes to be held open for hours. That gives the GOP leadership time to wheedle and bribe (through the addition of pork barrel budget lines) recalcitrant colleagues to get in step with the party line.

To combat this some progressive Democrats have put forth some specific proposals. Reps. David Obey (Wis.), Barney Frank (Mass.) David Price (N.C.) and Tom Allen (Maine) unveiled a package off 14 reforms that:

- Prohibit all recorded votes in the House of Representative from lasting longer than 20 minutes without the consent of the leaders of both parties.
- Make it an ethics offense for one member to make funding requested by another member dependent on how that member votes.
- Make it an ethics offense for any member to advocate a specific funding line in the budget unless that member discloses whether he or she has a financial interest in the funded entity.
- Mandate that the House only consider legislation that has been printed and made available to all members of the house for a 24 hour period.

Will these reforms ever see the light of day? Don't count on it.

After all, we're at war, and that is Bush's ultimate victory: Perception management for a war the administration is losing afar to protect itself from defeat in the war they are winning at home.

—Joel Bleifuss

IN THESE TIMES

"With liberty and justice for all..."

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We're blushing

I just finished reading every article in the "Who Is Sherrod Brown?" issue (December 19). A very solid issue! Now I am looking up a couple of Web sites that I saw in the magazine. Your magazine has had a string of excellent covers lately. My wife (especially) and I used to complain about the covers. Thanks for your work; I will start paying more attention to your Web site if you will be in my mailbox only monthly.

*Jerry Depew
Laurens, Iowa*

Democrats' drug failures

Much kudos to Garrison Keillor (whose program we love in the federal Supermax prison, and hopefully, officials will one day permit us radio again); Silja J.A. Talvi (who through her exposés of the prison industrial complex has earned our deepest respect); Ryan Grim (who we hope to hear more from), and *In These Times* for "The Drug War: Just Say No" (November 21).

However, as someone who has repeatedly slammed Clintonesque liberals for their inhuman criminal justice policies and support for the prison industrial complex, I am disheartened to see that when liberals do speak out against the atrocities of their own policies, the discussion is relegated to the war on drugs, a mere aspect of the multifaceted beast they have conspired to create.

Always a step ahead (behind?) the right, Clinton's socially sadistic policies and even many judicial appointments have truncated—where not wholly eradicated—protections in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights in the criminal context much further than the right ever dreamed of doing in the context of civil rights.

These liberals are directly responsible for the practical annihilation of the Great Writ of *habeas corpus* with passage of the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA). This applies to all federal and state prisoners, not just terrorists, leaving tens of thousands of wrongfully convicted prisoners to languish and die without a forum for review of their illegal convictions and sentences.

What about abolishing federal parole and mandatory minimum sentences (25 of the author's total 261-and-half-year sentence is a mandatory minimum for gun possession as an 18-year-old first-time offender; not for drugs)? What about fighting for prisoners' human and civil rights? Those were all but scrapped in theory with

the 1996 Prison Litigation Reform Act, also drafted by the Clinton administration.

In the midst of the criminal "justice" horrors, the Democrats nominated none other than John Kerry, a former prosecutor and strong supporter of Clinton's draconian policies. Ironically, it was Bush who paid lip service to prisoners' loved ones, albeit insincerely and through religious rhetoric.

Again, I applaud liberals for finally speaking out against their fellows' insane war on drugs, but I ask everyone to remember that the insanity of this nation's criminal justice system stretches far, far beyond the drug war. As a first step in combating this insanity, I would urge readers to pressure both liberal and conservative legislators to pass legislation guaranteeing every U.S. citizen the right to vote, including the 2 million prisoners who could easily swing a national election. And who knows, maybe then we can also change the mind of all those liberal Democrats who voted to go to war.

*Mark Jordan
Federal Prisoner
Florence, Colo.*

Go get 'em!

Susan Douglas: Shame on you! Just as I was settling in to relax my tired 94-year-old bones, your "Missing Their Moment" (November 21) got me all fired up. I received the same letter from Nancy Pelosi and I indeed had the same reaction as you. You struck just the right chord.

At the moment we may be repressed, but we are not going to take it anymore. We will get rid of all the yellow bellies in our party. If you were close by I would be tempted to place a chaste kiss on your apparently fevered brow.

*George M. Blaesi
Eugene, Ore.*

Sadly, there's not enough paper

"Precipitating Disasters: A Timeline" by David Sirota (October 24) was extremely informative and valuable. I wish similar "timelines" could be constructed for other actions of the U.S. government, including of course the war in Iraq.

*Ernst Kallenbach
Gainesville, Fla.*

Oral History

Senior Editor Kurt Vonnegut faxes his word art our way every once in a while. Below is one of his latest contributions to enliven the office.

I AM TALKING
IMPEACHMENT.
ENOUGH IS ENOUGH.
IF PRESIDENT BUSH
DOES ORAL SEX
IN THE OVAL OFFICE,
AND I DON'T CARE
WITH WHOM,
HE IS HISTORY!

AP 10

Kurt

Dear Readers:

We welcome you to the new and expanded monthly *In These Times*.

While staying true to our tradition of original reporting and provocative political analysis, we've redesigned the magazine for readability and increased the page count to deepen our coverage. The new 48-page format allows for more in-depth investigative features, such as Silja J.A. Talvi's cover story this month on the Character First! Initiatives sweeping public institutions; reflective essays on social issues of the day, such as Lakshmi Chaudhry's examination of the recent flurry of Iraq soldier memoirs; and expanded reporting on debates within the progressive movement. Regular departments, available only to our print readers, such as "Act Now" (pg. 10) and "Spin Cycle," (pg. 43) will cover political efforts on the ground, while others such as "The Lexicon" (pg. 7) and "Excerpt" (pg. 44) track political dialogue in America and around the world. We hope that you'll find our new look easier on the eye and more stimulating to the mind.

As we launch this updated format, we are also increasing our Web-only content in order to keep readers aware of breaking news and analysis. We hope that this combination of approaches will better serve the *In These Times* community and help us to grow and thrive.

In this era of consolidation, independent media is more valuable than ever, and here at *In These Times* we continually strive to provide you with news and perspectives that you can't find elsewhere. We hope you will continue to support and enjoy the magazine. And we welcome your feedback on our new look and approach. Please write: Letters to the Editor, 2040 North Milwaukee Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60647, or submit your letters online on the "Contact Us" page of www.inthesetimes.com.

Happy New Year,
The Staff of *In These Times*

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Don't miss our exclusive Web-only stories:

Lakshmi Chaudhry on *Brokeback Mountain* and the search for romantic love

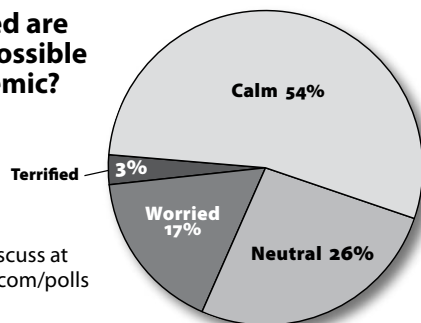
Salim Muwakkil on decades-long efforts to bring Chicago police commander Jon Burge to justice

Christopher Hayes' interview with Ugandan AIDS activist Beatrice Were

Robert W. McChesney and John Nichols on the history of objectivity in journalism

Also: Listen to "Fire on the Prairie," a radio forum sponsored by *In These Times*. This month: filmmaker Heather Rogers on her new book, *Gone Tomorrow: The Hidden Life of Garbage*; and Reverend Billy and the Church of Stop Shopping.

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“What a country calls its vital economic interests are not the things which enable its citizens to live, but the things which enable it to make war. Gasoline is much more likely than wheat to be a cause of international conflict.”

SIMONE WEIL
THE NEED FOR ROOTS (L'ENRACINEMENT [1949])

QUID PRO QUO

THE QUID:

During the 2002 campaign, Sen. Larry E. Craig (R-Idaho) received \$166,736 from electric power corporations—the most he received from any industry.

THE QUO:

In November, Craig eliminated funding for the Fish Passage Center, a small federal agency that counts endangered fish in the Columbia River. The center had angered the hydroelectrical industry this summer, after a judge, citing its data, ordered federal dam managers to spill water over dams in order to increase survival of Snake River salmon.

“I guess I am flabbergasted,” Michele DeHart, the manager of the Fish Passage Center, told the *Washington Post*. “We are biologists and computer scientists, and what we do is just math. Math can’t hurt you.”

BY TERRY LABAN



the lexicon

catch and release: n.

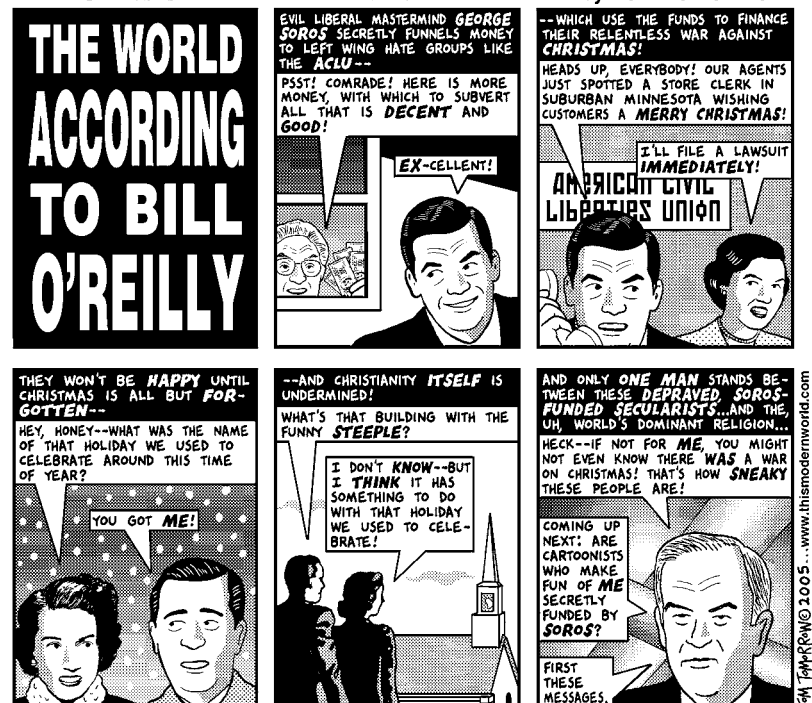
TRADITIONAL USAGE: the practice of releasing caught fish back into the water so as not to deplete fisheries.

CURRENT USAGE: a Bush administration term for a central tenet of American immigration policy, wherein immigration officials “catch” undocumented workers trying to enter the country and then “release” them back to their home countries: “This practice of catch and release has been the government’s policy for decades,” said President Bush in a November 28 speech in Tucson, Arizona. “It is an unwise policy and we’re going to end it.”

The opposite of “catch and release” would be “kill and fillet.” Presumably, this won’t be what the President chooses to call his proposed alternative.

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW





The July hanging of two gay teens in the city of Mashad sparked international outrage.

Iran's Anti-Gay Pogrom

American gay rights groups are ignoring systematic persecution in the Islamic Republic

BY DOUG IRELAND

THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC of Iran—under the new government of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad—is engaged in a major anti-homosexual pogrom targeting gays and gay sex. This campaign includes Internet entrapment, blackmail to force arrested gays to inform on others, torture and executions of those found guilty of engaging in “homosexual acts.”

Homosexual acts have been considered a capital crime in Iran since the 1979 revolution that brought the Ayatollah Khomeini to power. Iranians found guilty of gay lovemaking are given a choice of four death styles: being hanged, stoned, halved by a sword or dropped from the highest perch. According to Article 152 of Iran's penal law, if two men not related by blood are found naked under one cover without

good reason, both will be punished at a judge's discretion.

Iran's crackdown on gays drew worldwide protests (except in the United States) after the hanging for “homosexual acts” of two teenagers—one 18, the other believed to be 16 or 17—on July 19 in the city of Mashad. Charges against the two teens included the alleged rape of another youth. But three independent gay sources inside Mashad told Afdhere Jama, editor of *Huriyah* (an Internet zine for gay Muslims), that the teens were well known in the city's underground gay community as lovers who lived together, and that the rape charge was fabricated. The editors of an underground Persian-language zine in Iran (who requested anonymity out of fear) also confirm that their own Mashad sources said that the rape charge was trumped

up—a view now generally accepted. In any case, the hangings were illegal under international law because Iran is a signatory to two treaties that forbid executing minors. Since then, there have been reports of at least a dozen more gay victims who have been executed.

“Under Islamic law, which has been adopted by Iran's legal system, it takes four witnesses to prove an act of homosexuality, which is a capital crime. That's why it's much easier for the Islamic government to invent other criminal charges against gay people to get rid of them,” Jama told me. The Iranian gay zine's editors said the same, urging Westerners to be “very careful” before accepting such criminal charges at face value, as they are “most likely false.”

Amir is a 22-year-old gay Iranian who was arrested by Iran's religious morality police as part of a massive Internet entrapment campaign targeting gays. He escaped from Iran in August, and is now in Turkey seeking asylum in a gay-friendly country. Through a Persian translator, Amir gave me a terrifying, firsthand account of the anti-gay crackdown.

Amir's first arrest for being gay came when police raided a private party. “The judge told me, ‘If we send you to a physician who vouches that your rectum has been penetrated in any way, you will be sentenced to death,’” says Amir. He was fined and released for lack of proof that a sexual act had taken place.

Later, an unrepentant Amir set up a meeting with a man he met through a Yahoo gay chat room. When his date turned out to be a member of the sex police, Amir was arrested and taken to Intelligence Ministry headquarters, “a very scary place,” he says. “There I denied that I was gay—but they showed me a printout from the chat room of my messages and my pictures.”

Then, says Amir, the torture began. “There was a metal chair in the middle of the room—they put a gas flame under the chair and made me sit on it as the metal seat got hotter and hotter. They threatened to send me to an army barracks where all the soldiers were going to

rape me. The leader told one of the other officers to take [a soft drink] bottle and shove it up my ass, screaming, 'This will teach you not to want any more cock!' I was so afraid of sitting in that metal chair as it got hotter and hotter that I confessed. Then they brought out my file and told me that I was a 'famous fag-got' in Shiraz. They beat me up so badly that I passed out and was thrown, unconscious, into a holding cell.

"When I came to, I saw there were several dozen other gay guys in the cell with me. One of them told me that after they had taken him in, they beat him and forced him to set up dates with people through chat rooms—and each one of those people had been arrested; those were the other people in that cell with me."

Eventually tried, Amir was sentenced to 100 lashes. "I passed out before the 100 lashes were over. When I woke up, my arms and legs were so numb that I fell over when they picked me up from the platform on which I'd been lashed. They had told me that if I screamed, they would beat me even harder—so I was biting my arms so hard, to keep from

screaming, that I left deep teeth wounds in my own arms."

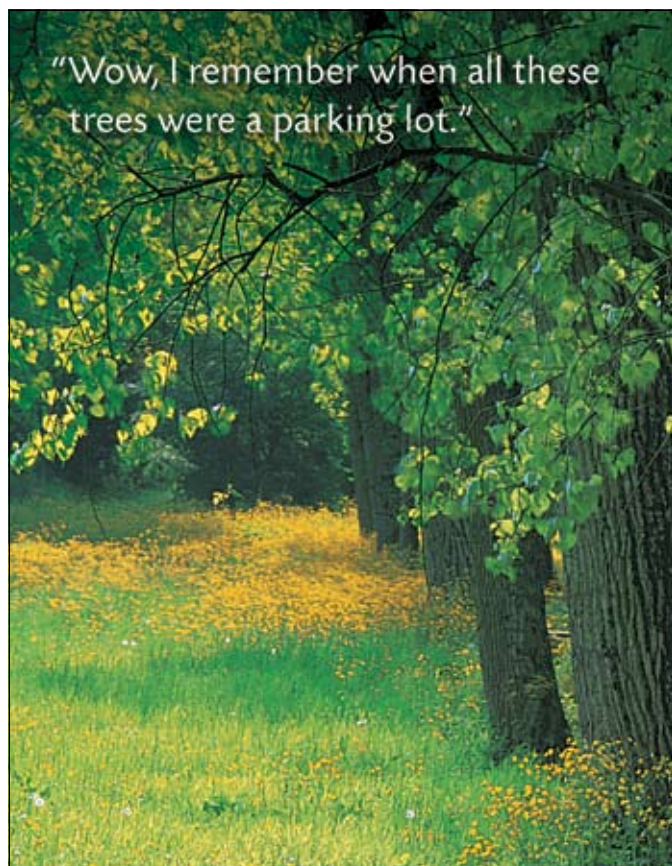
After this entrapment and public flogging, Amir's life became unbearable. He was rousted regularly at his home by the *basiji* (a para-police made up of thugs recruited from the criminal classes and the lumpen unemployed) and by agents of the Office for Promotion of Virtue and Prohibition of Vice, which represses "moral deviance"—things like boys and girls walking around holding hands, women not wearing proper Islamic dress and prostitution. Says Amir, "In one of these arrests, Colonel Javanmardi told me that if they catch me again that I would be put to death, 'just like the boys in Mashad.' He said it just like that, very simply, very explicitly. He didn't mince words. We all know that the boys who were hanged in Mashad were gay—the rape charges against them were trumped up, just like the charges of theft and kidnapping against them. When you get arrested, you are forced by beatings, torture and threats to confess to crimes you didn't commit. It happens all the time, and has to friends of mine."

Amir's experience is typical—as is the

lack of concern evidenced by U.S. LGBT organizations. Both of the principal U.S. gay rights organizations—Human Rights Campaign and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force—have failed to incorporate international solidarity with persecuted gays into their fundraising-driven agendas, and neither have mobilized public protests against Iran's anti-gay pogrom. Their European counterparts, in contrast, organized multiple demonstrations at Iranian embassies across the Continent.

The Persian Gay and Lesbian Organization (PGLO) is the principal group for Iranian gays, claiming 29,000 on its e-mail list. The PGLO—which publishes a monthly Internet magazine in Persian, hosts radio netcasts into Iran, and has secretariats in Turkey and Norway—has appealed to Western gays to mobilize international protests against the inhumane tragedy that has befallen Iranian same-sexers. To find out how to help, visit www.pglo.org. ■

DOUG IRELAND, an *In These Times* contributing editor, can be reached through his blog, *DIRELAND*, at <http://direland.typepad.com/direland/>.



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Sam Alito: the good, the bad ... the neutral.

The Three Alitos

WHEN IT COMES to Supreme Court nominees, conservatives face a quandary. They want a justice who is a conservative ideologue, but publicly call for a judge who would be a non-ideological, strict-constructionist umpire, whose only agenda is a deep desire to divine the original intent of our forefathers.

To squiggle out of this contradiction, conservatives delineate three spheres of judicial evaluation—the personal, the political and the professional—and emphasize whichever helps their case. So we have not one, but three Sam Alitos: the personal Alito, affable, courteous, and humble; the political Alito, anti-*Roe*, anti-union, anti-Warren Court; and the professional Alito, a blank slate, the Platonic ideal of equanimity and forbearance. It is this Alito (and not the one who wrote those nasty things about *Roe* while in the Reagan administration) who meets with pro-choice senators, and assures them he’s “not an advocate” and doesn’t “give heed to [his] personal views.”

But what of those who know all three Sam Alitos? For fellow alumni of Yale Law’s Class of 1975, Alito’s nomination raised a dilemma: Many of them liked the personal Sam and loathed the political Sam. What to do? Soon after the announcement one classmate sent an e-mail to the class, saying he’d received requests for interviews from reporters and wondered if others were interested in talking to the press. Steven Brill, founder of *American Lawyer* and Court TV, wrote back to say he was getting “buried in calls.” “Though I did not know Sam well, I’ll probably take a few and, of course, speak highly of him as a person

and a smart pick for Bush.”

More e-mails followed, mostly in this vein. Tulane law professor Joel Friedman vowed to be “completely positive even though we disagree on fundamental policy issues.”

But then Charles Brown, a D.C. public interest lawyer shattered the bonhomie with an e-mail titled: “J. Alito—NO—his gang wants to turn back the 14th Am[en]d[men]t & gut Commerce Clause.” “Classmates,” he wrote, “I don’t relish writing this letter, but it’s time we decide which side we are on. ... Our training is to be leaders in time of crisis, not cheerleaders for a classmate’s ambitions. ... If he is your friend, invite Sam Alito to dinner—but, for God’s sake, don’t promote for Bush, Scalia, and Clarence their ironclad fifth vote.”

A debate then ensued among the class’ Democrats about just which Alito mattered. “Get real,” another classmate shot back to Brown. “I part ways with Sam on policy, but the bottom line has to do with the caliber of person, and jurist, going up to the Supremes. And for my money, there’s no better caliber of either. We should be grateful to God that Bush aimed high on this one.” Friedman chimed in, “We all voted for President. My candidate

lost. I need to get over it and be thankful that he chose someone of Sam’s intellect and, more importantly, character.”

The camps divided along this line as the exchange continued. Peter Goldberger, a criminal appellate attorney who’d already given some favorable comments to the *Los Angeles Times*, wrote in to say he’d been contacted by the White House Office of Political Affairs, which hoped to send reporters looking for liberal friends of Sam to him. “Just to let folks know that there is now a political campaign underway to exploit, and I’m sure to distort, the nuanced and sincere comments of those of us who have spoken publicly on this subject. I shouldn’t have been surprised.”

“I think there is some category confusion regarding comments about Sam,” wrote Boston attorney Andrew Cohn in the final e-mail in the thread. “[L]et’s stipulate what we all know: Sam is a terrific person, a great guy, a smart and knowledgeable lawyer. That misses the point; I am sure I would find many judges past and present who meet the test of ‘terrific person, great guy, smart and knowledgeable lawyer.’ That is insufficient to trump debate as to whether ... Senate Democrats and other American voices are entitled to

act now



EARTHQUAKE RELIEF

As an early winter settles in, relief workers in India’s Kashmir region are racing against time to provide shelter and medical assistance to the thousands displaced by the Oct. 8 earthquake.

In late November, the U.S.-based volunteer group Kashmir Earthquake Relief (www.kashmirrelief.org) partnered with mountaineering gear company The North Face to gather more than 3 tons of cold-weather gear, including tents, sleeping bags and backpacks. Five-time Everest summitter Wille Benegas then led a team of mountain climbers into some of the regions’ most remote alpine villages to deliver the supplies. Follow their harrowing progress at www.humaned-getech.com/expedition/nf10/.

object to judicial views that ... suggest the selection of Sam is aligned with partisan governing, unreflective of vast portions of the population.”

Somewhere in the middle of this exchange, someone wrote a “heads up” pointing out that Sam Alito’s e-mail was right there in the “cc:” field. Apparently he’d been receiving the flurry of missives debating his suitability.

So what did Judge Alito think of the fracas in his inbox? Well, it depends on which Sam Alito read the e-mail. If it was the personal Sam Alito, his feelings might have been hurt; if it was the political Sam Alito, he might have been angry at the liberals exhorting their colleagues to block his nomination; and if it was the professional Sam Alito, we’re supposed to believe he felt nothing at all.

—Christopher Hayes

Cleaning Up Elections in Connecticut

TAKE ONE GOVERNOR in hot water. Raise heat until the governor goes to prison. Combine with a unified and persistent coalition of reform advocates, and mix in widespread outrage at corruption. Add a dash of bipartisanship. What have you got?

In Connecticut, it’s the recipe for breakthrough campaign finance reform.

On November 30, the Connecticut House of Representatives followed the state Senate in approving a measure introducing voluntary public financing for legislative and statewide offices. A week later, Republican Gov. Jodi Rell—who took office after Gov. John Rowland resigned in a corruption scandal—signed it into law.

Advocates, seeking to get big money out of politics, call the key provision “Clean Elections.” By raising a specified goal in small contributions, major party candidates can opt to receive a public grant to finance their campaigns rather than go the conventional route of begging from well-heeled interests. The measure also bans contributions from lobbyists and state contractors, limits campaign spending for recipients of public financing, and places new restrictions on political action committees, or PACs. Public financing for legislative races takes effect in the 2008 election cycle and in 2010 for statewide offices.

Connecticut, which had earned the nickname “Corrupticut” after a recent

rash of state and municipal scandals, is the first state to create a public financing mechanism for legislative races by legislative action. Arizona and Maine had previously adopted clean elections through referenda.

Democrats control both houses of the Connecticut General Assembly and House Majority Leader Christopher Donovan (D-Meriden) made sure that the Democrats had the votes to pass the measure. Although Rell was clear in her support for the measure, only four Republicans in each chamber voted for it.

“This sets the bar higher for what people who want reform can expect from their lawmakers,” says Nick Nyhart, executive director of Public Campaign, a national campaign finance reform group. As an advocate in the early ’90s, Nyhart had co-authored the first version of the bill, and credits the victory in part to the fact that when the scandals broke, a long-time measure backed by reformers was ready. Groups like the Connecticut Citizen Action Group (CCAG) and the state Common Cause chapter insisted on a strong bill with the Clean Elections component or the “entire reform community would walk.”

The new law will “stop the endless money chase,” says Tom Swan, CCAG executive director. “It will result in the transformation of the political process where the power of voters will be increased and corporate control lessened.”

But the law is not without its critics. The ban on lobbyist and contractor contributions may spark a court challenge over free speech issues. Republicans, and some reformers, view a provision that allows PACs controlled by party leadership to aid campaigns with “in-kind” contributions as having the potential for abuse.

Particularly contentious are the thresholds needed for third-party candidates to receive public financing. Critics say the legislation favors the Democratic-Republican duopoly by forcing third party candidates to collect signatures of eligible voters equal to 10 percent of the previous election turnout as well as to reach the same threshold of small contributions as the larger parties. A third party candidate has to collect signatures of 20 percent of the number of voters in the previous election to obtain a full grant.

Donovan defends the third party provisions as a “not unreasonable” method to screen out fringe candidates. The

provisions are better than federal law, he argues, because funding isn’t based on the number of votes a candidate receives, which delays eligibility until the next election cycle. Plus, he notes that the current third party provisions were one of the prices of getting the votes for passage.

While Jon Green, director of Connecticut’s Working Families Party, supports the bill overall, he describes the third party provisions as “unquestionably unfair in principle.” Green supports a lower signature threshold, around 3 to 5 percent, and notes that the significant small donation requirement would likely eliminate all fringe parties.

—Hank Hoffman



Voting in Caracas

Chávez’s Opposition Opts Out

CARACAS—ON DECEMBER 4, Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez called the opposition’s eleventh-hour decision to withdraw from the country’s congressional elections an attempted “coup” and pledged that his government would respond with a “counter-coup.” He added that every time the opposition attempts to force him out of power, his government “deepens the process of transformation.” Evidently, changes in store for 2006 will go beyond the radicalization that characterized 2005.

With the three main parties of the opposition—Democratic Action (AD), Venezuelan Project and Justice First—on the sidelines, the ruling coalition took all 167 seats in congress. The voter abstention

rate, however, reached 75 percent, in spite of Chávez's fervent pleas for people to vote. The opposition claims that the new congress lacks legitimacy, despite the fact that voter turnout never reached the 50 percent mark in off-year elections in the decade prior to Chávez's rise to power in 1998. While hardly a victory for the opposition, the high abstention rate does signal that Chávez's widespread popularity has not rubbed off on his fellow Chavistas.

The opposition's decision not to participate took most Venezuelans by surprise. The opposition claimed that the National Electoral Council (CNE) is beholden to the Chavista parties. But this objection does not explain why the opposition parties began to withdraw just hours after the CNE had made important concessions that were encouraged by Organization of American States electoral observers. In previous months, the leaders of the main opposing parties had firmly defended the decision to participate in the elections, in contrast to the opposition's fringe groups, which called for abstention and civil disobedience. But once AD announced its new line, the other parties followed suit,

leaving the impression that they were bowing to pressure.

It is unclear, however, where the pressure came from. The Chavistas place full blame on the Bush administration. "Behind the decision is imperialism, the government of George Bush, his ambassador, and their dollars seeking to delegitimize Venezuelan democracy," says Nicolás Maduro, president of the national assembly. AD congressman Alfonso Marquina characterized the accusation as "conspiracy theory." But Maduro's claim is bolstered by the fact that María Corina Machado, the vice president of SUMATE, a civil organization funded by the National Endowment for Democracy, met with Bush earlier this year. SUMATE had been adamantly calling for abstention prior to AD's announcement.

The privately owned media may have also exerted pressure. The TV channels Globovision and Radio Caracas, in particular, had adamantly questioned the credibility of the CNE from the outset. The media has largely eclipsed the much-discredited parties in opposing Chávez, even taking "credit" for playing a key role in efforts to overthrow him in 2002.

Another source of pressure was the opposition rank and file, who, disillusioned with party leaders, insisted they do something dramatic. Polls that placed Chávez's popularity at around 65 percent were embarrassing to parties that had tried to oust him on grounds that he no longer enjoyed the confidence of the people. Justice First's Ricardo Martínez Hernaiz said, "We had no choice but to call for abstention since our members were not going to go to the polls in any case."

That Venezuela will undergo important changes in the months ahead is now a foregone conclusion. After emerging triumphant in the August 2004 recall election, Chávez announced that he defended private property rights—but not as an absolute principle. In 2005 the government expropriated a paper mill, a valve company and a sugar mill that had shut down and been taken over by workers. Chávez announced that all other companies that closed down would suffer the same fate. Landowners were also put on notice that estates producing less than 80 percent of their capacity would be expropriated. In 2005 the government proceeded to partial take over 21 estates, along with a Heinz

appall-o-meter

7.2 Let Them Eat Lead

Gossip columns were atwitter in November with details of an event the *New York Post* dubbed "Mitzvahpalooza." To mark her passage into Jewish adulthood, Elizabeth Brooks of New York was subjected to the grisliest cultural travesty since ... let's see ... Star Jones' wedding. At a reported cost of \$10 million, the girl's father, David H. Brooks, wrangled the talent of rapper and aspiring dildo merchant 50 Cent, paleoshemales Steven Tyler and Joe Perry of Aerosmith, and the inimitable Don Henley, Stevie Nicks and Kenny G.

Like so many bat mitzvahs, this was less about the girl than it was about dear old dad—who, the *Post* reports, changed into studded leather and pink suede outfits at various points in the evening. Funny thing is, Brooks doesn't need the notoriety this bash has earned him. He is CEO of DHB Industries, a recipient of hundreds of millions in no-bid contracts with the U.S. military. He is under investigation by the Securities and Exchange Commission—and unpopular with shareholders—for trades in company stock that netted him \$186 million. And the U.S. Army and Marines have recalled nearly 23,000 of the bulletproof vests Brooks sold them through

a subsidiary of DHB. The vests apparently have difficulty stopping 9mm rounds.

1.4 The Triangle Time-Waste Factory

The next time you go online to buy a Level 60 shaman or some other avatar, ask yourself whether you really want to promote sweatshop labor.

In case you're wondering, avatars are virtual figures useful to players of "massively multiplayer online games" such as "World of Warcraft." As the *New York Times* reports, a market is thriving at online auction sites such as eBay where actual cash is traded for avatars and other goodies pertaining to the games. The buyers are typically affluent gamers from Korea, Japan and rich Western countries who don't want to deal with the drudgery of working their way through, say, levels one through 30 of a game.

The sellers are increasingly Chinese "gold farmers," entrepreneurs who set up sweatshops where workers pull 12-hour shifts for as little as \$3 a day (plus room and board). As many as 100,000 Chinese work as gold peasants, the *Times* reports, and



represent as much as half of all players of popular games at any given time.

4.2 Heartless

A Chinese government official has copped to one of the seamier elements of the Asian power's towering trade surplus: selling the organs of the condemned to foreigners seeking transplants. Accord-

ing to the *Australian*, Vice Health Minister Huang Jiefu told a Chinese magazine the government intended to "tidy up" this aspect of the "medical market." Nearly 70,000 transplants have been performed in China since 1993, the magazine reported, and almost all the organs came from executed prisoners.

The Chinese used to dispatch the condemned—all 3,000 to 6,000 of them annually—with a bullet to the head or the heart. They recently switched to lethal injection owing to the brisk market in tickers and corneas. Nothing, it seems, is wasted: The *Guardian* reports that a Chinese cosmetics company is developing products for the European market with the skin of the executed.

—Dave Mulcahey

food-processing plant in the eastern state of Monagas. Chávez has begun to call these policies “21st century socialism.”

But the high abstention rate in December does force Chávez to reexamine the performance of elected officials. Two Chavista mayors of Caracas—one representing the entire city and the other, one of its boroughs—have bickered over who is responsible for the city’s dismal garbage collection service. Chávez has threatened to impose a “revolution in the revolution” in order to purge his movement of self-serving activists and possibly corrupt officials.

As for the opposition parties, Chávez insists that their withdrawal from electoral politics was a major blunder and predicts that they will disappear from the political scene. The Chavistas call for the emergence of a new opposition that accepts the rules of the game and Chávez’s legitimacy. Some opposition leaders, such as AD’s former presidential candidate Claudio Fermín, participated in the elections by forming a new party, a move that was hailed by Chávez.

In contrast to Chávez’s declarations, Foreign Minister Ali Rodríguez proposes a dialogue with the main opposition parties, an approach designed to undermine the fringe groups’ call for insurgency.

With Chávez up for re-election in December 2006, the attitude of the Chavistas toward the opposition will help determine which candidates emerge.

—Steve Ellner

Swift-Boating Bernie

THE SWIFT BOAT Veterans and POWs for Truth, the 527 organization with close ties to the 2004 Bush/Cheney campaign, helped to sink the presidential ambitions of Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.). Now they are back on the attack. In a letter to his fellow marauders, John O’Neill issued the following “call to duty.”

The mission: “To stop the most dangerous liberal in America from winning election to the U.S. Senate.”

The target: Rep. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), who is running for the U.S. Senate seat being vacated by Jim Jeffords.

O’Neill writes: “Sanders is as radical as they come ... more liberal than even Ted Kennedy or Hillary Clinton. ... [A]ll it takes is one maverick senator to really gum up the works, [and] Sanders is about to turn into a dangerous liberal wrecking

snapshot



CHICAGO—On a bitter cold Tuesday, December 6, a small crowd gathers for the National Day of Counter-Recruitment Action amidst the downtown holiday lights. Juan Torres is an antiwar activist who speaks out in memory of his son, Juan Manuel Torres, who was killed in Afghanistan. (Photo by Ken Carl)

crew. ... Sanders is treated like a ‘hero’ by liberal Hollywood elites ... [T]he radical far left group Moveon.org raised more than \$100,000 for Sanders in just one weekend. ... Defeating Bernie Sanders is just about as important as defeating John Kerry was! Please join with me today to provide crucial financial support to Greg Parke’s campaign for the U.S. Senate.”

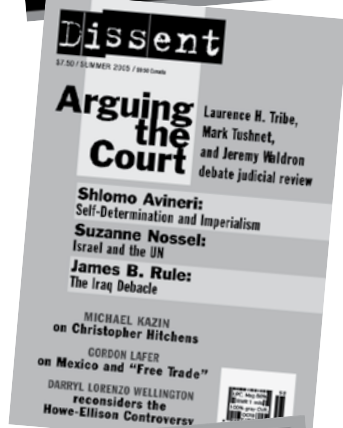
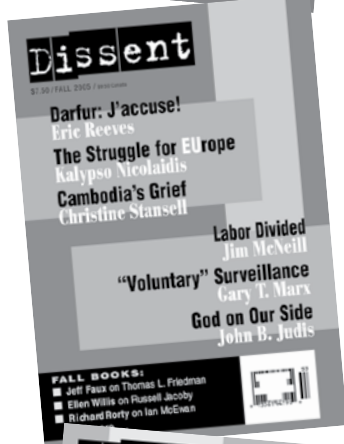
Colonel George E. “Bud” Day (Ret.), another Swift Vet, is also lending his support to Lt.Col. Parke, USAF (Ret.).

In his fundraising letter, Day writes: “As America fights to defend our citizens from terrorists, I’m shocked at how weak many of our ‘leaders’ in Congress are. Politicians like Ted Kennedy, Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders have no idea what it takes to defend our nation. ... As a patriotic American who has spilled his blood in defense of our great nation, I will NOT stand by while these politicians put the American people at risk. ... Greg Parke

is running against one of the most radical, anti-war liberal politicians out there: Bernie Sanders of Vermont. Sanders is a self-proclaimed ‘Socialist’ and a member of the ‘Democratic Socialists of America.’ ... Today, instead of flying jets to defend his country from Middle East terrorists, [Greg Parke] is running to defend us all from a dangerous, anti-war left-winger like Bernie Sanders.”

Proto-fascists like Day and O’Neill aren’t Sanders’ only obstacle on the road to the Senate. He must overcome the arsenal of cash that GOP frontrunner Richard Tarrant accumulated when he sold his software company to General Electric Co. for a \$100 million profit. Tarrant, Vermont’s richest citizen, has vowed to spend \$5 million of his personal fortune on the race—apparently the price he has put on the U.S. Senate seat he plans to buy, and the one that Sanders plans to win.

—Joel Bleifuss



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—ALEXANDER COCKBURN

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BY SUSAN J. DOUGLAS

My Fellow Americans ...



LEAKS FROM D.C. insiders aren't just for the mainstream media. Using our close ties to the PR firm the Lincoln Group, In These Times has gained exclusive access to the advance draft of George Bush's 2006 State of the Union address. Here is it:

Mr. Speaker, Vice President Vader, members of Congress, distinguished guests, and fellow citizens: America this evening is a nation on its knees, and I am here to hoist us up. (What's this word

"petard"?)

As we gather tonight, hundreds of thousands of American elderly are wandering the land, some choosing to gouge their eyes out rather than try to understand our path-breaking prescription drug plan. Through the tragedy of Katrina, in which the Great Almighty expressed his displeasure with jazz, partying and poor black people, we also saw what happens when seniors live in cities near the sea. Even more deadly, terrorists continue to plot against America and the civilized world, and our intelligence tells us that the evil-doers are now using our nation's nursing homes as sleeper cells, training our seniors to become suicide bombers. The terrorist thugs point to the prescription drug plan and ask, "What have you got to lose?" By our will and courage, this danger will be defeated. [Applause]

Therefore, tonight I am pleased to announce our new "Healthy Elders Initiative," which I urge Congress to pass. All our courageous seniors will be rounded up and relocated to "Healthy Seniors Compounds" in Nebraska. Katrina taught us that we can no longer rely on a bloated and ineffective federal government, so we have retained the Corrections Corporation of America, the patriotic private contractor we have partnered with in our "Healthy Prisoners Initiative," to build and oversee these compounds. Once there, seniors will no longer need Social Security or Medicare because Halliburton will generously provide them with the resources they need to meet their maker as soon as possible. With the support of Congress, this initiative will save billions in unnecessary entitlements. [Applause]

Since we last met in this chamber, our country has conquered numerous challenges, but you would not know it through the terrorists in the press. In the enemy newsrooms around the country we have found diagrams of

American nuclear power plants and public water facilities, detailed instructions for making chemical weapons, surveillance maps of American cities, thorough descriptions of American landmarks and addresses of American public officials. The *New York Times* is stockpiling yellow cake. We refuse to live in the shadow of this ultimate danger. [Applause]

Some things the federal government can do better, like produce the news. Therefore, tonight I announce our historic "Intelligently Designed News Initiative." Drawing from our successes over the past year in reforming American journalism, our citizens will now get their news from our new "Press Freedom" office in the West Wing. With us tonight is that great patriot and press freedom fighter, Judy Miller. Judy's courage became a beacon of freedom throughout the world as she went to jail to protect the sacred principles of journalistic integrity she had vowed to uphold. All

news about the federal government will now come from Judy, and I know she'll do a heckuva job. [Applause]

For many Americans, the months since Katrina have

brought sorrow and pain that will never completely go away. This past September, Trent Lott stood at the grave of his old home and said, "Semper Fi, my love. I will rebuild you." Trent is with us tonight. [Applause] Thousands of others should never suffer again as they did in the aftermath of Katrina. Thanks to the work of our law enforcement and FEMA coalition partners, many of our poor, black citizens from New Orleans and Mississippi have been dispersed throughout our great land. Now they must be put out of their misery. Through our "Bundle Up Initiative," which will eliminate all support for heating costs for the poor, our "Back to Nature Initiative," which will eliminate the food stamp program and bar poor people from grocery stores and soup kitchens, and our "Evian for All Initiative," which will supply these citizens with floodwater bottled from the streets of New Orleans, soon our great country will never have to witness the spectacle of poor people again. [Applause]

Tonight, America remains on the offensive against the terrorists who started this war in Iraq. My administration will not cut and run, as some traitors have suggested. I am pleased to announce that the Iraqi people will have achieved full democracy and autonomy by March and our victory will be complete. Karl says we can bring our troops home then, just in time for primary season. [Applause]

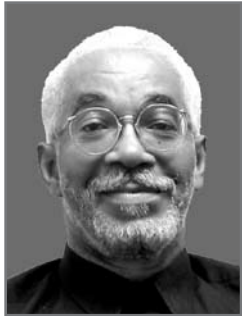
May God continue to bless America. [Applause] ■

Evil-doers are now using nursing homes as sleeper cells, training our seniors to become suicide bombers.

THE THIRD COAST

BY SALIM MUWAKKIL

What's the 411 on 9/11?



IN EARLY DECEMBER, the 9/11 Public Discourse Project—a private group formed by 9/11 Commission members after their official term expired in 2004—chided the government for ignoring the lessons learned from the Commission's probe of the terrorist attack.

But the group's patrician members failed to answer many questions. For example, how, precisely, did the Twin Towers fall? Why did Seven World Trade Center fall despite incurring no structural

damage? Why were there no jets to intercept the hijacked planes? What happened to the "National Command Authority" that supposedly protects us in emergencies?"

This official reticence, combined with a lack of curiosity from the media, has sparked a grassroots inquiry, publicly dubbed The 9/11 Truth Movement.

The movement caught my attention when I saw Dr. David Ray Griffin speaking at the University of Wisconsin at Madison on C-SPAN earlier this year. Before retiring last year, Griffin was emeritus professor of Philosophy of Religion at the Claremont School of Theology in California. He has written several well-regarded books on religion and spirituality, co-founded the Center for Process Studies and is considered one of the nation's foremost theologians. I am familiar with his work and regard him as a wise writer on the role of spirituality in society.

So, it was shocking to see him pushing a radical conspiracy theory about 9/11 on C-SPAN. His 2004 book, *The New Pearl Harbor: Disturbing Questions about the Bush Administration and 9/11*, has become the manifesto of this movement. At the University of Wisconsin, this distinguished academic told students at Bascom Hall that "there is no escape from the frightful conclusion that 9/11 was engineered by the Bush administration and its Pentagon."

What could have transformed this sober, reflective scholar into a conspiracy theorist? His passionate advocacy and sterling reputation recharged my latent skepticism. His charges that controlled implosions destroyed the World Trade Center's Twin Towers especially resonated with me.

When the towers fell in 2001 it reminded me of how Chicago's public housing high-rises collapsed vertically into their own foundations following controlled implosions. I noticed the similarity between the two but as-

sumed that was just the way tall buildings fell.

Inherently skeptical of official dogma, the left has an affinity for alternative explanations, which sometimes makes progressives pushovers for any scammer with a debunking tale to tell. People like Griffin and Brigham Young University physics professor Steven E. Jones, who also believes the towers were toppled by a controlled demolition, are not the usual suspects. Their dissent from the official line is more credible because their credentials connote respectability. Griffin stoked my interest because of my respect for his scholarship. But his expertise was in a realm completely unrelated to the knowledge needed to make his theories credible.

Progressive journalists have an added burden not to be seen as fodder for conspiracists. Sometimes they need a little help. Groups like Political Research Associates

(PRA), based in Somerville, Massachusetts, exist to make sure progressives are not duped by conspiracists of any stripe. "The antidote to conspiracism is Power Structure Research based on some form of institutional, systemic or structural analysis that examines race, ethnicity, gender,

sexual identity, class and other factors that are used to create inequality and oppression," the PRA explained in a preface to its review of Griffin's *The New Pearl Harbor*.

The reviewer was Chip Berlet, a senior analyst at the PRA. In an interview with Amy Goodman on "Democracy Now!," Berlet agreed with Griffin that "there are a number of unanswered questions" regarding 9/11, but assessed Griffin's work as "a lot of ... armchair guesswork by people who haven't done their homework." Berlet noted his surprise at this because Griffin's "previous work has been stellar. He's one of the singular most important religious philosophers in America. I don't understand this lapse."

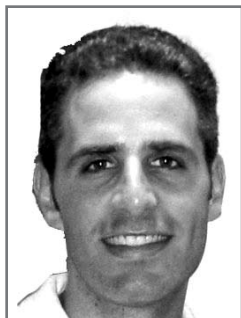
Berlet isn't alone in wondering what happened to Griffin. *In These Times* Contributing Editor Terry Allen, a former editor at Amnesty International, is similarly unimpressed. "I respect Griffin, but he's just wrong on his theories," she says. Allen spent two months assessing the major conspiracy theories concerning 9/11 and she has concluded there is not much to any of them—especially Griffin's. "I found plausible explanations for most of the things he disputes. I think part of it is that he's a theologian who operates on faith," says Allen.

A lack of faith in the Bush administration, as well as its pathological aversion to transparency, are what fuels the ongoing skepticism about the official 9/11 story. Unfortunately, debunking conspiracy theories is unlikely to change that. ■

Inherently skeptical of official dogma, the left has an affinity for alternative explanations.

BY DAVID SIROTA

Will the Dems Step Up in the New Year?



AS THE WINTER holiday season blows in and 2005 begins to wane, both major political parties face big questions that will impact American politics far into the future.

The question for Republicans is simple: Are they going to continue fueling their culture of corruption and intensifying their wild-eyed ideological jihads?

The question for Democrats is also simple, but more frustrating because the answers should be obvious: Does the party

really want to be a majority party?

Republicans are answering their big question with a big yes. By all indications, the GOP is going to continue down its path, with no realization that they are in a downward spiral. In recent months, we've seen no sign of remorse from the GOP for all of its corruption scandals, and a redoubled effort to gut basic government services in the name of financing new tax cuts for the wealthy. Meanwhile, Republicans have largely refused to reevaluate their disastrous Iraq policies, instead doing everything they can to label war critics "cowards," "gutless traitors," or worse.

Democrats are answering their big question in much the same sad way. As the *New Republic* recently reported, Democratic aides admit that some Democratic officials "simply aren't willing to really go all-out in the quest for the majority." Put more succinctly, Democrats' answer to their big question is, at best, a maybe, and more likely a big no—at least not yet.

2005 has shown that many Democratic Party leaders have made a conscious decision to take no position on almost every major challenge facing America. On the major economic issues, the party has talked a good game and lashed into the GOP—but on some of the biggest congressional votes, many Democrats have stood in lockstep with the Republicans. Just look how many Democratic senators supported the bankruptcy (18), energy (25) and class action (18) bills for proof.

There have been opportunities for Democrats to show a real contrast with the GOP's culture of corruption. But it's clear the party is still in a business-as-usual mode. For instance, Democrats all year have publicly bragged about their ties to corporate lobbyists, going out of their way to land stories in Capitol Hill publications coddling business interests. Meanwhile, most Democrats joined

hands with the GOP in voting in a \$3,100 raise for lawmakers at a time of massive deficits and cuts to critical programs.

And then there is Iraq. Even as Vietnam war heroes like Rep. Jack Murtha (D-Pa.) try to lead their party to reevaluate the Bush administration's destructive war policies, the party continues to stress that it does not have an official position—seemingly more concerned with the desires of the Washington cocktail party circuit and its insulated "strategic class" than with actually serving as a voice for the majority of Americans who support a withdrawal.

Perhaps most problematic for Democrats is that some of its highest-profile spokesmen seem to go out of their way to undercut the party's courageous leaders.

For every Rep. George Miller (D-Calif.) or Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) fighting against the corrosive influence of corporate lobbyists, there is a Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-Md.), publicly bragging that he wants to be the first contact for K Street lobbyists.

For every Rep. Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio) fighting against the latest corporate-written trade deal, there are groups of House and Senate Democrats that provide the critical votes needed to pass the Central American Free Trade Agreement.

For every move by a Sen. Harry Reid (D-Nev.) to demand answers about prewar intelligence, or a Sen. Russ Feingold (D-Wis.) to press a timetable for withdrawal from Iraq, or a Murtha who says it's time for a change, there is a Sen. Joe Biden (D-Del.) opposing a withdrawal, a Sen. Ben Nelson (D-Neb.) saying he has no regrets about voting for a war based on lies, or a Rep. Rahm Emanuel (D-Ill.) actually telling reporters that the party won't have an Iraq position until "the right time."

How each party answers its big questions will not only decide the 2006 or 2008 elections but whether America will still have a political system that represents our country's people. Polls consistently show that Americans want a vastly more progressive economic policy, are concerned about Big Money's influence on our government and support bringing the troops home from Iraq within a year. In other words, what the public wants is very clear despite the political establishment's efforts to muddle the issues.

That means that while both parties face a different set of questions, their responses will give us an answer to the biggest question of all: Will the new year witness the final death throes of America's representative democracy? ■

Do the Democrats actually want to be a majority party? The answer appears to be, at best, a maybe.

BY JOEL BLEIFUSS

Ghosts in the Voting Machines



Concerned about reports of election fraud and vote suppression in the 2004 election, Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.), the ranking Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee, asked the Government Accountability Office (GAO), the investigative arm of Congress, to examine the allegations. In September, the GAO released a report that found electronic voting systems “have caused local problems in federal elections—resulting in the loss or miscount of votes.” In the 2004 general election, about 64 percent of voters cast ballots on one of two types of electronic voting systems: optical scan systems, which read marked paper ballots, and direct recording electronic systems (DRE), which have a touchscreen that voters use to make their choice.

The GAO highlights one major problem with electronic voting systems: They can be hacked because of woefully inadequate security systems.

The report notes, “Regarding key software components, several evaluations demonstrated that election management systems did not encrypt the data files containing cast votes (to protect them from being viewed or modified). ... If exploited, these weaknesses could damage the integrity of ballots, votes and voting system software by allowing unauthorized modifications.”

The report goes on to say that flaws in electronic voting security protections “could allow unauthorized personnel to disrupt operations or modify data and programs that are critical to the accuracy and the integrity of the voting process.”

The report cites these examples:

- In some cases, other computer programs can access voting system files that contain records of

cast votes, and alter files without a record of hacking showing up in the system’s audit logs.

- On Diebold’s Accu-Vote-TS, a DRE, it “might be possible” to alter ballot definition files—so votes on the touch screen for one candidate would actually be recorded and counted for another.
- Computer security experts working with a Florida local elections supervisor demonstrated that someone with physical access to an optical scan system can use altered memory cards, falsifying election results without any record of the deed.
- In one DRE model, the same personal identification number was programmed into all election supervisor cards nationwide—meaning the number was widely known.
- Several reviews reported smart cards (which activate touch screens on DRE’s) and memory cards (which program an optical scan system’s terminals) were not secured by some voting systems. Reviewers exploited this weakness by altering such cards to improperly access administrator functions, vote multiple times, change vote totals, and produce false election reports in a test environment.

Because elections are overseen by the states, the federal government is unable to mandate electoral procedures. So the GAO called on the Election Assistance Commission (EAC), the four-member presidential commission established by the Help America Vote Act (HAVA), to implement voluntary reforms and safeguards such as establishing security standards and a national program to certify electronic voting systems. However, the GAO notes “important initiatives are unlikely to affect the 2006 election due, at least in part, to [Bush

administration] delays in appointment of EAC commissioners and in funding the commission.”

The GAO concluded: “Until these efforts are completed, there is a risk that many state and local jurisdictions will rely on voting systems that were not developed, acquired, tested operated, or managed in accordance with rigorous security and reliability standards.”

Rep. Conyers responded to the report this way: “I am shocked at the extent and nature of problems that GAO has identified. ... It is incumbent upon Congress to respond to this problem and to enact much needed reforms such as a voter verified paper audit trail that protects all Americans’ right to vote.”

Carter weighs in

Former President Jimmy Carter has voiced concerns similar to Conyers’.

Few people are as familiar with running fair elections as he. The Carter Center has monitored more than 50 elections worldwide.

In a September 2004 *Washington Post* article, Carter predicted that the looming presidential election would be as contentious as the one in 2000, with Florida again at the center of the storm. He wrote that “some basic international requirements for a fair election are missing in Florida,” the most “significant” of which were:

- A nonpartisan electoral commission or a trusted and nonpartisan official who will be responsible for organizing and conducting the electoral process before, during or after the actual voting takes place.
- Uniformity in voting procedures, so that all citizens, regardless of their social or financial status, have equal assurance that their votes are cast in the same way and will be tabulated with equal accuracy.

"With reforms unlikely at this late stage of the election, perhaps the only recourse will be to focus on maximum public scrutiny on the suspicious process in Florida," he wrote.

As Carter predicted, in 2004 Florida again featured prominently, if less publicly, as a state where incidents of voter suppression and alleged election fraud tilted the vote toward George W. Bush. But the big story in 2004 was the swing state of Ohio, where the presidential election is thought to have been decided.

Carter weighed in again, in September 2005, when the Commission on Federal Election Reform released its report. Carter and James Baker III, co-chairs of the commission, wrote in the report's introduction: "We propose ways to give confidence to voters using electronic voting machines that their votes will be counted accurately. We call for an auditable backup on paper at this time."

The commission report states: "Congress should pass a law requiring that all voting machines be equipped with a voter-verifiable paper audit trail ... This is especially important for direct recording electronic (DRE) machines for four reasons: (a) to increase citizens' confidence that their vote will be counted accurately, (b) to allow for a recount, (c) to provide a backup in cases of loss of votes due to computer malfunction, and (d) to test—through a random selection of machines—whether the paper result is the same as the electronic result."

Profile in Courage?

On October 28, New York University professor Mark Crispin Miller met Senator John Kerry at a political event and gave him a copy of his new book about the 2004 presidential election, *Foiled Again*. In a November 4 interview on Amy Goodman's "Democracy Now!" radio show, Miller said: "He told me he now thinks the election was stolen ... He said he doesn't believe that he is the person who can go out in front on the issue because of the sour grapes ... question."

While writing the book, Miller learned Kerry was persuaded to concede the election by his top advisers, particularly Bob Shrum. However, Miller says, John Edwards wanted to hold off conceding until they had more information. According to Miller, Kerry called Edwards and said, "They [his advisers] say that if I don't pull out, they, [Kerry's political opponents] are going to call us sore losers." To which Edwards replied, "So what?"

According to Kerry spokeswoman Jenny Backus, none of the conversation Miller reported on "Democracy Now!" occurred. She told Raw Story Web site, "I know Mr. Miller is trying to sell his book ... but his recent statements about his conversation with Senator Kerry are simply not true."

Yet Miller isn't the only person Kerry reportedly voiced concerns to. Robert Parry, who as a reporter for *Newsweek* in 1987 helped break the Iran-Contra story, reported on ConsortiumNews.com that Kerry "suspects that the election was sto-

len, but that he didn't challenge the official results because he lacked hard proof and anticipated a firestorm of criticism if he pressed the point."

Jonathan Winer, a former longtime Kerry adviser and a former deputy assistant secretary of state, told Parry, "Kerry heard all the disquieting stories, but he didn't have the evidence to do more." Winer said that "disquieting stories" include Republican election officials in Ohio providing an inadequate number of voting machines to heavily Democratic precincts and reports from voters who said that when they cast their ballots on DRE machines they saw their vote transferred to Bush. On top of that, Winer said, Kerry was mindful of what happened after Gore won the popular vote but lost the election, when five Supreme Court Republicans stepped in and stopped the recount.

"Do you think they're too ethical to steal an election?" Winer said. "In 2000, they did steal an election."

According to Winer, Kerry didn't believe evidence existed that could prove the 2004 Bush/Cheney Campaign committed election fraud. Further, Kerry knew he would be harshly criticized if he challenged the election results without compelling proof that a crime was committed.

"The powers in place would have smashed him," Winer said. Like Miller, Winer reported that Kerry suspects that the electronic voting machines were possibly tampered with.

Winer, now an attorney specializing in information security, told Parry it is conceivable that Republican operatives hacked the DRE voting systems in 2004. Without the confession of a credible witness, he noted, such crimes would be hard to prove. "There are systems for one-time use that erase themselves afterward," Winer said. "You'd have to have a confession, and anyone who would confess would look psychotic."

Parry observes: "Kerry's decision not to fight has left millions of Americans wondering if their democratic birthright has been stolen—along with the last two presidential elections."

I have asked Kerry to set the record straight for the book I am co-authoring with Steve Freeman, *Was the 2004 Presidential Election Stolen? Exit Polls, Election Fraud and the Official Count*, which will be published this spring by Seven Stories Press, but have yet to receive a response. ■



Lennard Pearson, 81, casts his vote in the US presidential election using an electronic touchscreen voting machine in Monterey Park, Calif. in 2004.

ROBYN BECK/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

CULT OF CHARACTER

BY SILJA J.A. TALVI

How the 'secular' Character Training Institute is working to build evangelist Bill Gothard's vision of a First-Century Kingdom of God—one city, one state, one school board, one police force and one mind at a time.

OKLAHOMA CITY—From the outside the bland, unmarked exterior of the Character Training Institute’s headquarters blends remarkably well into its immediate surroundings. This is a section of Oklahoma City that hasn’t yet benefited from the nearby, upscale urban development intended to draw both tourism and business to the area. Both the downtown Greyhound Station and the county jail are situated a few blocks from here, which explains the number of forlorn, transient men and women wandering down West Main Street. For the

most part these folks seem to have more immediate priorities than paying attention to the dozens of foreign-looking visitors entering and exiting the 10-story Character Training Institute (CTI), which also serves as the headquarters of the International Association of Character Cities (IACC).

But one elderly woman wearing mismatched clothing and a weathered plastic visor ambles across the street to get a closer look. She leans against the wall and tries to peer inside, but the heavy double doors, darkened windows and drawn shades make it nearly impossible to do so.

“What’s going on in there?” she asks a young man with a military-style haircut walking toward the door. He takes a polite moment to explain that this is a very important “Building Cities of Character” conference, sponsored by the IACC. Many people, he adds, have come from all over the world to be here. And with that, he disappears into the building. The woman tries, one last and unsuccessful time, to see what’s going on inside.

“The sin of witchcraft”

Inside the institute, Arizona state treasurer David Petersen takes to the conference podium to tell how his state’s Family Services Committee passed “Character Education Legislation.”

“All schools now have it implemented,” he says proudly. “We’re fighting for the soul of this nation.” Petersen is not being hyperbolic. He attributes his passion for

“character” to a personal meeting with evangelist Bill Gothard.

Gothard, the 74-year-old, unmarried man at the head of the Oak-Brook, Illinois-based Institute in Basic Life Principles (IBLP)—which brings in an estimated profit of at least \$63 million annually—has been in the evangelism business since 1964. Originally named the Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts, IBLP changed its name in 1990. All totaled, IBLP boasts that at least 2.5 million people have attended the organization’s seminars and ministries in the United States and other countries, including Russia, Mongolia, Romania and Taiwan.

Although legally and fiscally independent, the CTI is for all intents and purposes a “secular” front group for Gothard’s IBLP. In the last decade, the CTI has quietly gained entry into hundreds of elementary, middle and high schools, state and city offices, corporations, police departments and jails.

Though he never uses the term, Gothard’s ideology fits into the framework of the burgeoning “Christian Reconstructionist” movement, which aims to rebuild society according to biblical mandates. Within the Christian Reconstructionist worldview, modern-day chaos is directly attributable to the division of church and state and the consequent degradation of individual character.

For Gothard, the solution is restoring the United States—and then the rest

of the world—to something that he calls “The Sevenfold Power of First-Century Churches and Homes.”

The concept of obeying God-granted authority runs through virtually all IBLP-published materials. “The key to understanding authority is identifying four areas of God-ordained jurisdiction: parents, government, church leaders, and employers,” reads an introductory passage to *Basic Life Principles Seminar*. “When a decision is to be made, we must ask, ‘Whose jurisdiction is this under?’ God gives direction, protection, and provision through human authorities. If we rebel against them, we expose ourselves to the destruction of evil principalities. ... This is why ‘rebellion is the sin of witchcraft.’”

According to Gothard’s interpretation, first century Roman Centurions were admirable figures of authority who followed their orders without question—the prototypes for the kinds of police officers that CTI instructor Ray Nash, the sheriff of Dorchester County, South Carolina, wants to create in his state and elsewhere.

Nash has conducted “Police Dynamics” training for numerous U.S. and international police departments.

“Really, what Police Dynamics is, in a nutshell, is biblical wisdom that’s been packaged into a law enforcement message,” Nash told Rev. Mark Creech in a November 2004 article for Alan Keyes’ RenewAmerica Web site.

Gothard's Gender Laws

Rigidly defined gender laws are common to fundamentalist interpretations of nearly all major religions, and Gothard's IBLP is no exception.

But Gothard combines a unique interpretation of early church practices with an unbending intensity in expectations for his adherents, especially regarding the hierarchies of authority and command. "God designed the father to be the leader and protector of his family," writes Gothard in *Achieving Daily Success: A Guaranteed Plan for Fathers*.

Again, he brings comparisons to the animal kingdom to bear: "God compares Satan to a roaring lion, and there is much to learn from the world of lions. Each community of lions has a leader. This male is strong and aggressive against any intruder. He knows that if another male lion challenges him and defeats him, the intruder will ravage all the female lions and kill all the young lions. Therefore, the dominant male will fight to the death to defeat any challenger who approaches his pride. May you be such a mighty man for your family!"

In two other IBLP resource training manuals, *Training Faithful Men* and *Training Faithful Women*, men are taught to understand "Why Wives React" ("When a husband fails to be a spiritual leader ... His wife feels insecure") and that "a wife's world is her home and family. She finds her security and fulfillment in wisely managing them."

Communicating love through good manners includes "ordering for her at restaurants."

Faithful women, for their part, are taught by the IBLP to "respect the God-ordained office of her husband even when his human responses do not measure up to it. ... The more a wife demonstrates her confidence that God is working through her husband, the more aware he will be of his Scriptural position."

Particular attention is paid to the right ways and times to "appeal" to one's husband" and to "develop genuine attractiveness," including learning "which colors go best with your skin tones," and how to "have a happy, joyful face and use your clothes to draw attention to it."

Character Cities Conference

"Leaders around the world are increasingly concerned by the decline in society's standards," CTI founder Thomas A. Hill writes in his introduction to the brochure inviting people to the IACC conference. "As you reflect on the past, you may ask yourself, 'Where did the good old days go?' and 'How did we get to this point?' The answer is rooted in a growing lack of personal character."

Anyone wanting to explore such questions and willing to fork over \$360 for this annual three-day conference would be buzzed in through the double doors into an oddly serene and well-ordered environment.

Decorated in a faux-Victorian style, the lobby is spotless and dust-free, complete with displays of fake flowers in vases, rows of couches and psalm-quilted pillows. Low-level classical and hymnal music is piped in, but there are no television sets, radios or wall clocks to be seen. A busy group of young, unadorned women in ankle-length tan skirts, flats and dark polo shirts—and their adolescent male counterparts in pressed shirts and slacks—seem to make sure that everything runs on schedule. It doesn't take long to notice that the female roles are rigidly secretarial and/or service-oriented. (See sidebars, "Gothard's Gender Laws" and "Staying ALERT.")

When they arrive at the lobby desk, registrants are handed their Character First! plastic binders. The cover announces "a new paradigm for personal growth," while the introductory letter from IACC Director Steven Menzel thanks attendees for their "commitment and determination to revitalize your community based upon the timeless attributes of character."

Over the course of the next three days, attendees will come to learn that absolutely everything bad happening in our

society—from crime to divorce, from drug use to school shootings—can be explained by lack of character.

Instilling character

The CTI was founded in 1996 by Kim-ray Oil and Gas tycoon Thomas A. Hill. A tax exempt, nonprofit educational organization, the institute's mission is to instill 49 "Character Qualities" into four major civil institutions: family, business, education and law enforcement. In 1998 the CTI spread its wings and established the IACC, which aimed to make local governments "commit to develop character."

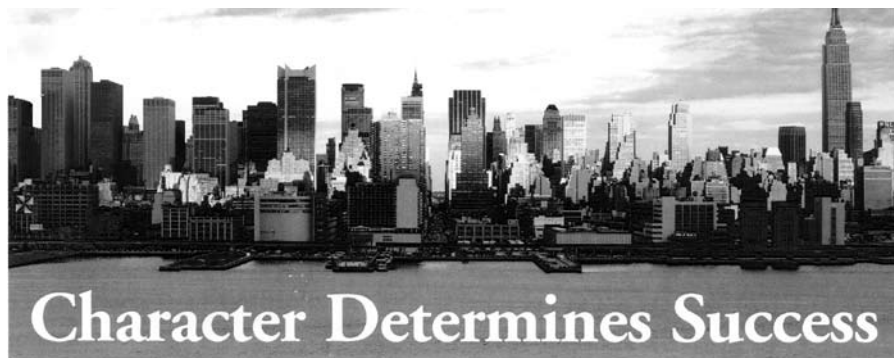
The Character Cities concept has caught on quickly: 160 cities ranging from Compton, California, to Hamburg, New York, 31 counties, and seven states—Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Georgia, Ohio, Oklahoma and South Carolina—have now passed "character" resolutions and proclamations based on CTT's teachings and materials.

Nor has the CTI's influence been limited by American borders. Forty-seven international cities have already declared themselves Cities of Character, and at least one-third of the approximately 100 people attending the IACC conference arrived from foreign countries, including Romania, Mexico, Guatemala, Peru, Argentina, the Philippines and Sri Lanka.

Many have gone so far as to brand their localities with Character First! symbols, plaques, flags, pins, posters, brochures, books, mouse pads and calendars.

Understandably, the Character Training Institute tries to obfuscate the links between its work and Gothard's reconstructionist Christian vision.

"This is not religion, these are character traits," says John Thomas, vice president for global infrastructure services for Perot Systems Corporation, during one of three successive business-oriented presentations at the IACC conference.



Speakers emphatically and repeatedly stress that Character First! training has nothing to do with promulgating religion. Instead, attendees are told, the training promotes great character and, as a side benefit, drives up corporate profit margins. The Character First! DVD is chock-full of tales of incredible savings to businesses: Kimray's Hill, for instance, talks of workers' compensation dropping from \$24,000 per month to a mere \$2,000 to \$4,000, while Todd Anderson, the vice president of C.P. Morgan, a home construction firm, brags about a tenfold increase in profitability attributable directly to CTI training.

The list of Character First! seminar attendees already reads like a who's who of top corporations and government institutions: McDonald's, Burger King, Aflac, Costco, Coca Cola, the Correctional Corporation of America, the Better Business Bureau, Tyson Foods, the U.S. Air Force, U.S. Navy, U.S. Marine Corps, U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Bureau of Prisons, the Arkansas Prison System and the U.S. District Attorney's office are all mentioned, in addition to more than a dozen school

The Character Council of Central Oklahoma has even entered into a "covenant" with the regional career tech programs, covering 12 campuses. "That's our plan for getting character qualities into the hearts and minds of all students," explains Dr. Earlene Smith, the Education Committee chairman for the council.

Other examples abound throughout the conference: McDonough, Georgia, flies a City of Character flag outside of city hall; Owasso, Oklahoma, police squad cars sport a "City of Character" emblem on each vehicle; and the Character Council of Florida has ensured that all elementary schools will incorporate CTI training by 2006, and expand from there to higher grades.

Sign of the eagle

On the surface it does not appear as though Gothard is at all involved in the "secular" character training that the CTI provides to countless schools, city councils, state agencies, corporations and law enforcement agencies across the world. Hundreds of cities have also passed their own character resolutions, modeled on

The list of Character First! Seminar alumni reads like a who's who of top corporations and government institutions: McDonald's, Coca-Cola, Tyson Foods, the U.S. Bureau of Prisons and the Marines.

districts (including Denver, Memphis and Ft. Lauderdale), and eight healthcare companies and hospitals.

At the conference, attendees are told that the IACC exists "to support government and community leaders who want to develop character in themselves and encourage it in their families and communities."

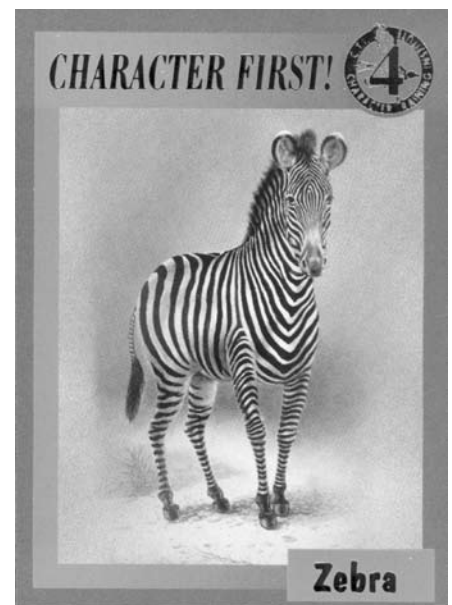
Oklahoma City—and the state of Oklahoma in general—seems to have truly taken this to heart. Here, even the local county jail's elevators feature Character First! posters in Plexiglass displays, and juvenile detainees study character concepts with the jail chaplains. Each employee receives a Character Bulletin with his or her paycheck, explains Chaplain Argyle Dick. "We hire for character, and we fire, most of the time, for lack of character. ... We are always looking for new ways to saturate even more of our employees with character."

the IACC's materials. None of the CTI/IACC materials mention Gothard's name, but the more obvious attempts to hide the connections end there.

CTI founder Thomas Hill is also the board chairman for the IBLP—alongside other influential board members, such as Rep. Sam Johnson (R-Texas).

There's also an omnipresent eagle symbol, identically illustrated for both organizations, with different acronyms encircling the image of the bird taking flight. Each group also uses the exact same 49 Character Qualities—CTI's Character Qualities delete all the references to Jesus Christ. Several of Gothard's books (and other Christian books, including Bill Burtress' *The Third Alternative: Christian Self-Government*) are for sale in the back of the CTI/IACC bookstore.

Then there are the shoutouts that Phil Heimlich, a conservative pro-lifer and



former Cincinnati city council member, gives to both Hill and Gothard at the IACC's "Building Cities" conference. One of the longest presentations at the conference is delivered by George Matix, the international director for the IBLP's missionary efforts. He describes the extent of their successes in bringing IBLP teachings to children and teens in at least 30 countries, under the initial pretense of teaching English and character training. (See sidebar, "From Russia to Australia: Character and Christ.")

Obedience, not willfulness

By the first day of the IACC conference, the main meeting room resembled a mini-U.N., complete with simultaneous translation for each of the non-English-speaking attendees.

The Philippines has one of the strongest international delegations here, led by attorney Francis Tolentino, the former mayor of Tagaytay. (His brother now holds the same office.) Tagaytay became a City of Character back in 2000 and, with Tolentino's assistance, the first nationwide Character Conference was held in the Philippines in 2002, with conference materials provided by the IACC.

Tagaytay not only has an official "character oath," but an "official jingle, so that the character program will always be inculcated in the minds of the people." Tagaytay police officers wear a City of Character badge, says Tolentino, and the city now requires character training before a marriage license will be granted. Mayor

Sally Lee of Sorsogon City speaks of similar initiatives in her city, where her “goal and objective [is] to really push through this kind of program.”

Most of the domestic or international attendees seem familiar with the concepts espoused; indeed, the vast majority represent city and character councils, state or local agencies, school districts or businesses that have already bought into ongoing trainings and supplementary materials.

It's hard to ignore how much money there is to be made in this enterprise. To

give a few examples: the Character First! resource disk set runs \$40 per month, and the framed character posters cost \$89 per month. The actual display cases for the monthly character qualities run from \$435 (aluminum) to \$685 (oak or cherry). For law enforcement, Sheriff Nash's “Police Dynamics” character concept-based DVD sets run \$595 for each series.

But for those of us who aren't yet in the loop—or convinced yet that we need to buy into the whole package—the conference organizers make sure to drive “char-

acter” as close to home as possible. Each presenter is introduced by name, and then by how many years he has been married, and by the number of children and grandchildren he has. (There are only a handful of female presenters; each is introduced in similar fashion.) All presenters are given a certificate at the end of his or her presentation, and a CTI official announces which one of the 49 Character Qualities best describes that person's accomplishments. During some of the presentations, the word “character” is repeated anywhere from four to six times a minute.

As if that weren't enough, attendees are told constantly to refer to the laminated, pocket-sized list of the 49 Character Qualities that are essential for true success in life.

“Obedience: Quickly and cheerfully carrying out the direction of those who are responsible for me,” reads one of the 49 Character Qualities. “Justice: Taking personal responsibility to uphold what is pure, right and true,” reads another.

Each of the 49 Character Qualities is not only contrasted with its opposite (“Willfulness,” for instance, as the oppo-

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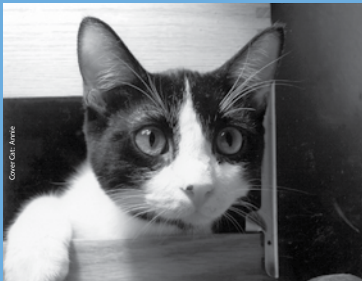
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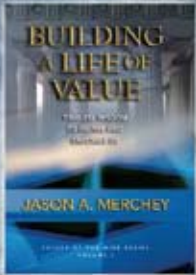
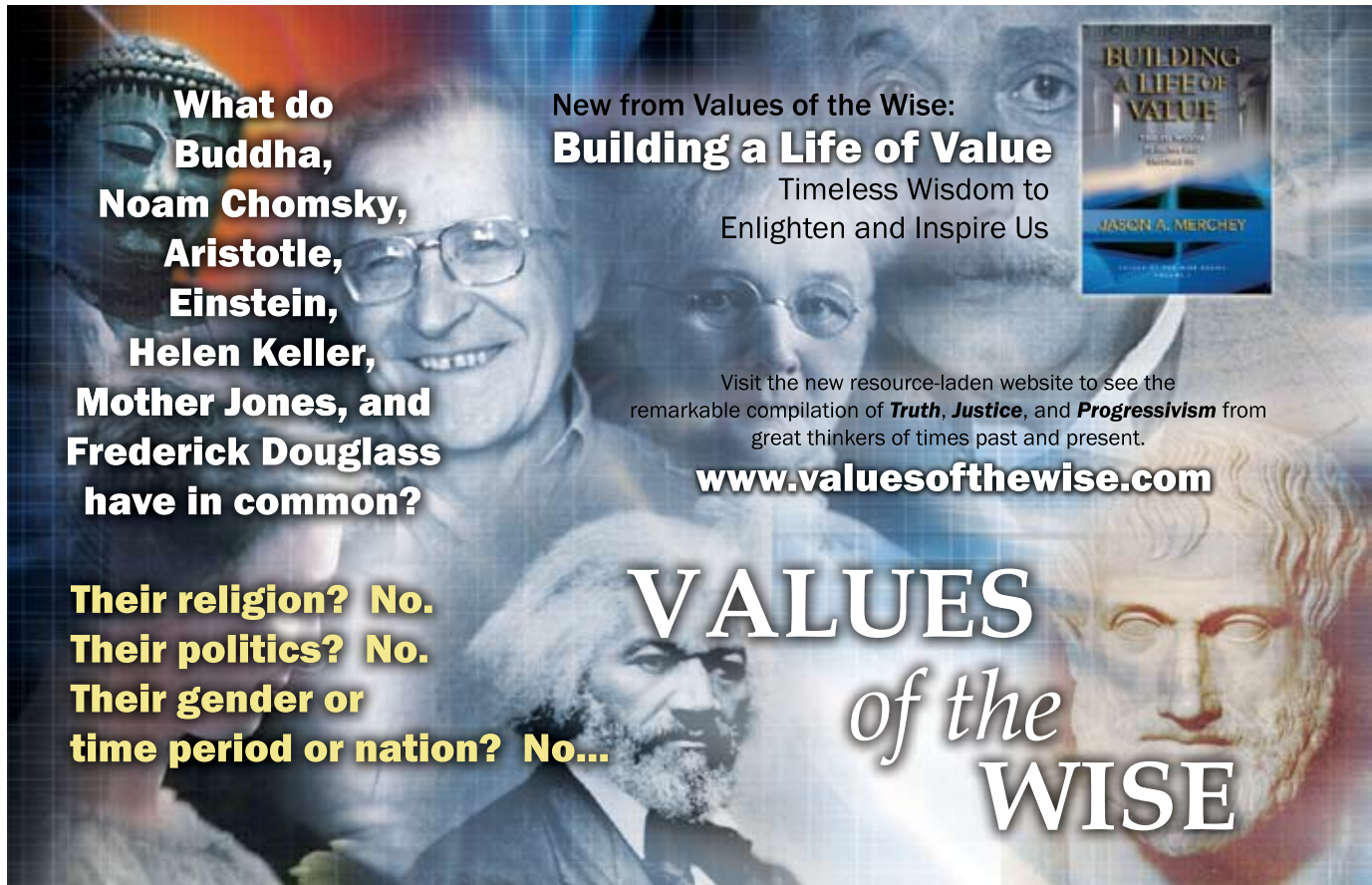
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site of "Obedience"); they are also paired with colorful animal figures and simplistic descriptions of how those animals represent these concepts. A mother wood duck and her ducklings represent "Obedience;" and "Justice" takes the form of a bull African elephant. Oklahoma City proclaimed September 25 a "ZOOrific Day of Character," with billboards and advertisements throughout the city encouraging parents to bring their children to the city zoo to learn about how various animals illustrate character traits.

The animal imagery isn't just reserved for the children's material; gigantic posters of the animals are plastered throughout the CTI headquarters, adjacent to posters featuring historical figures, such as Louisa May Alcott and Martin Luther King Jr.,

who, like the animals, are lauded for having displayed true character. (*Little Women* author Alcott, the poster explains, wrote to end her "monetary problems," but never lost sight of her primary responsibility to take care of her extended family.)

It's not really about the animals

Chuck Coker is an authorized Character First! trainer. He is one of the first to start muddying the "secular" concept by mentioning that he engages in missionary work in the IBLP Moscow orphanage, among other locations. But Larry Rhoads, the executive director of Character First!, quickly brings the focus back to both business and the family. One story moves the audience to wild applause: He

Trouble Brews for the IBLP in Indiana and New Mexico

In 2002, the Indianapolis Training Center/International Home for Children, an IBLP juvenile program that takes in "troubled" kids, came under fire when Indianapolis' Channel 8 "I-Team" went undercover to reveal widespread abuse of juveniles at the facility.

Founded in 1993 in Indianapolis (which became a City of Character in 1999), the facility accepted boys and girls in trouble with the law from all over the United States, as well as orphans from Monterrey, Mexico. According to IBLP materials, the once-incorrigible orphans excelled under the direction of character training, and many of them "had asked Jesus Christ to be their personal Savior."

In their report, however, the I-Team revealed rampant evidence of abuse of children as young as eight, including denial of bathroom privileges; being wakened at six in the morning to the sound of blaring marching music; repeated spankings; forcible restraint and handcuffing; and "prayer" isolation that stretched from several days to several weeks.

In New Mexico, the IBLP's partnership with the Corrections Corporation of America (CCA) to bring religious programming into a residential, 24/7 "God Pod" for female prisoners (first investigated by this reporter for the *Santa Fe Reporter*) sparked a November lawsuit from the Wisconsin-based Freedom From Religion Foundation, which contends that the CCA/IBLP program is in violation of the establishment clause of the First Amendment.

Staying ALERT

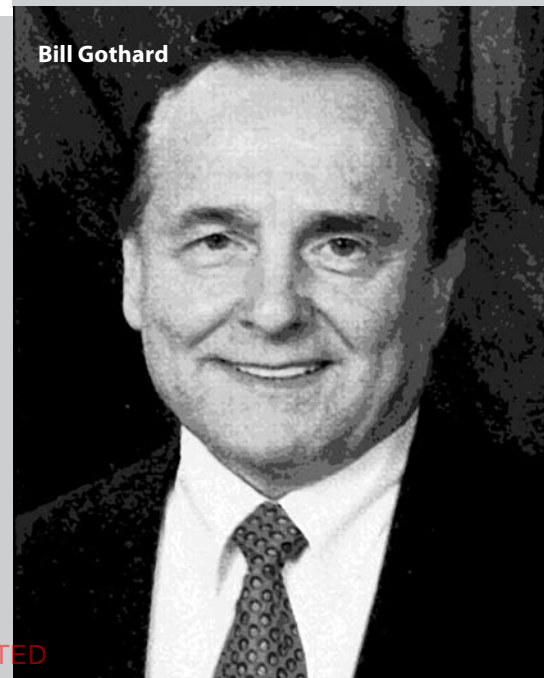
The Air Land Emergency Resource Team (ALERT) is an intensive IBLP program for young men to "achieve Godly maturity and fruitfulness in service to others." Steve Menzel of the (secular) IACC serves as the "ALERT Basic Training Commanding Officer."

For one year, young men ages 17 and older are sent out to ALERT headquarters in Big Sandy, Texas, where they learn the basics of disaster relief; aerial, underwater and land search and rescue; and evangelism. More advanced training includes EMT certification, aviation, aircraft maintenance, law enforcement, firefighting and intensive

biblical counseling of disaster victims. An ALERT Cadet program also exists for 8- to 17-year-olds, who can join their fathers in becoming strong enough to "overcome the evil one."

Young girls and women are not allowed to participate in ALERT training. But when the boys are away from Big Sandy on one of their domestic or international missions, "young ladies 15 and older" are allowed onto the territory to learn STEP: Skills Training for Emergency Preparation. A fee of \$895 includes basic plumbing, navigation, scripture memory and character training.

Bill Gothard



From Russia to Australia: Character and Christ

Religious organizations must walk a fine line when it comes to reaching out to U.S. schools, local governments and other taxpayer funded programs. CTI and the IBLP have found ways to skirt these restrictions, such as bringing teenage "Character Coach Teams" to Oklahoma schools, shelters and playgrounds, where they perform drills, hand gestures and chants along the lines of "I will sit or stand in attention/like a soldier on command!"

"We're building relationships with people in our community," says Mike Jestes, Community Services Director of the Western Hills Church in Oklahoma City. "We cannot share the gospel of faith in schools ... but for a week of character study, kids [who are interested] are invited into church through the schools, where they engage in scripture memory, skits, ropes course and Bible study."

Internationally, this process is much easier, as George Mattix, the international director of IBLP, explains. Since 1995, IBLP has operated the Moscow Training Center in Russia for homeless and orphaned children, where many of the IBLP missionaries and ALERT forces go to get hands-on training.

In addition, Mattix brags, 50 percent of Mongolians have already been reached with both IBLP and Character training. While this figure is impossible to confirm, Mattix says that most countries—from China to Taiwan, to Romania to Brazil (where some 7,000 students already study CTI materials translated to Portuguese)—are grateful for any outside assistance, whether in the form of housing, clothing, English language training or counseling.

In Australia, he says, "we go out to the Aborigines and work with them. ... The government is thrilled with the character program." So is the government of New Zealand, apparently, where "disenfranchised people in trouble with the law" are eagerly handed over to the missionaries.

"We can only take 12 at a time," Mattix bemoans, "but they want to throw out hundreds [into our programs]."

Mattix says he always explains to schools and government leaders that his group "talks about the Bible." According to him, they're usually still enthusiastic. "

'You can tell them what you want,' " Mattix says of the response they hear in New Zealand. " 'We don't know what to do with them.' "

describes how he realized how important it was not to leave his dirty socks inside out before leaving them for his wife to wash, something he had apparently been doing for their entire married life. The true measure of character, as it's repeated in mantra-like fashion, is what you do when no one is watching.

It's perhaps for this reason that Dr. Joseph Ahne, another certified CTI trainer, decides to be upfront about everything on the last day of the conference, over a breakfast of pancakes and syrup eaten under poster-sized animals.

"They don't tell you this here, but it's all biblically based," Dr. Ahne says. "They use the animals to illustrate the points that are all from the Bible. You see, it's about becoming like Christ. Through teaching the character, we're teaching people how to be like Christ. We could all use that."

A former Methodist preacher, Dr. Ahne says that he has devoted his life to spreading the teachings of the IBLP and the IACC, which he translates into Korean. Every year, Ahne leaves his home in Chicago and spends five months in Korea, where he has a staff of six full-time employees. Ahne says that they have already reached 18,000 Koreans with a combination of character-based trainings. He explains that he has brought teenage boys to the United States for

further education at the IBLP's ALERT training ranch in Big Sandy, Texas—as well as sending teenage girls to the IACC in Oklahoma City for their own form of service training. Home-schooling, he adds, is one of the biggest emphases of IBLP worldwide because the organization prefers that young people never get exposed to the pernicious influences in the public school system.

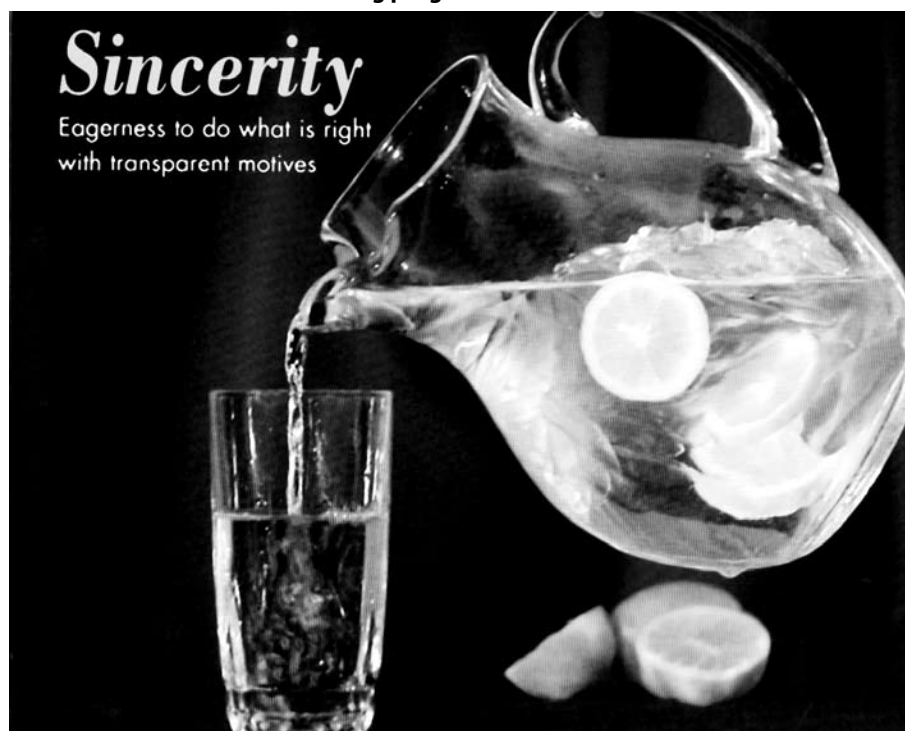
"We use this," he says, pointing to the Character First! binder in the middle of the table, "because we can't take religion into schools and government. But it's all based on the same thing."

Gothard's vision

Each of the 49 Character Qualities in CTI's secular materials have their exact counterpart in IBLP materials. In books like Gothard's *Power of Kingdom Living* and *The Sevenfold Power of First-Century Churches and Homes*, they are typically referred to as "The Laws of the Kingdom."

The IBLP's "blue book," formally titled *The Power for True Success*, is carried around by many of the IACC officials. It explains the imperative for learning the 49 character qualities this way: "Character reveals the Lord Jesus Christ, since He is the full personification of all good character qualities." It continues, "understanding character explains why things

Part of the Character First! training program



happen to us, because all things work together for good to conform us to the character of Christ.”

This book is now in the hands of most of the 1,200-strong Cincinnati police force, courtesy of a life insurance salesman and CTI cheerleader named Mike Daly who, along with Phil Heimlich, helped turn Cincinnati into a City of Character. The two worked hand-in-hand to implement the CTI training into nearly all facets of government and secondary education. During one of his trainings, Daly gifted curious officers with the religious books while telling them to become “apostles for character.”

In the blue book and other IBLP materials, the 49 character qualities take on a more strident and extremist tone. “Obedience” is defined as the “freedom to be creative under the protection of divinely appointed authorities. All legitimate authority comes from God. He is the One

Rights” and “Proper Submission.”

“Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord,” reads one of the biblical selections. Emphasis is placed on “courting” rather than “dating;” on women obeying their husbands; avoiding the “addiction” of all forms of music except for those written and/or approved by the IBLP; preserving marriage at all costs; and on the need for Christians to respect, obey and submit to church and government. These institutions and their rulers, as the workbooks explain, exist because of God’s will.

Again, here is the fundamental premise: what the IBLP hopes will come of these myriad efforts on secular and religious fronts is a patriarchal, hierarchical Christian government that truly has no place for dissent, for disbelievers, or for those whose character qualities fall short of expectations. Government, from this viewpoint, is akin to the right hand of God:

Gothard’s Institute in Basic Life Principles defines ‘Obedience’ as the ‘freedom to be creative under the protection of divinely appointed authorities. All legitimate authority comes from God.’

who sets up rulers and takes them down. ... God ordained government to carry out his will in matters of justice.”

“Those who violate God’s laws are like citizens who commit crimes,” Gothard explains in *Sevenfold Power*. “They are still citizens, but they lose certain rights and privileges that they otherwise would have enjoyed.”

Apparently, sometimes the sinners and the criminals are one and the same. In recent years, IBLP has expanded into highly controversial religious juvenile boot camps and, most recently, into a partnership with the private prison company, the Corrections Corporation of America, which has announced its intent to bring the teachings to all of the prisons it owns. (See sidebar, “Trouble Brews for the IBLP in Indiana and New Mexico.”)

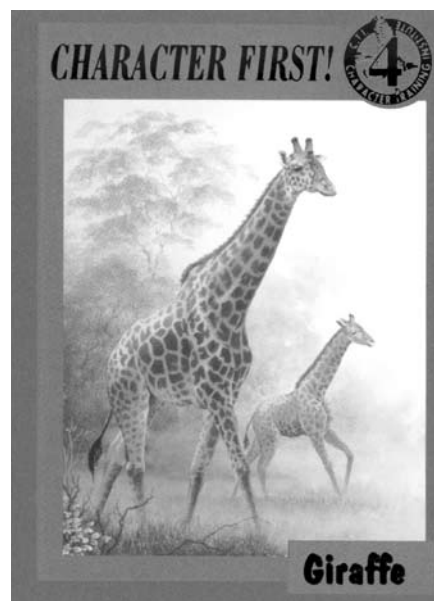
To take but one example, the workbook materials distributed to the prisoners in the CCA-run Grants, New Mexico, women’s prison include a breakdown of “basic life principles,” including “Moral Purity,” “Yielding

Nothing or no one should stand between the two entities, or question their right to rule over our lives.

“God ordained government to carry out His will in matters of justice. Rulers are to praise those who do well and punish those who do evil,” reads the IBLP’s *Power for True Success*. “Because civil authorities derive their power from God, they will be judged if they violate the Laws of God.” Church leaders, fathers and husbands, and even business leaders, are given nearly the same power in this conception of a well-ordered society: “Employees are to obey employers with wholehearted service.”

As Bill Burtress writes in a book sold in both the CTI’s bookstore and through the IBLP, *The Third Alternative: Christian Self-Government*, civil government is “an institution ordained and given by God ... [and] Christians are the stewards of civil government as an aspect of their stewardship of society.”

It is worth noting that the IBLP is just one organization whose ideals fit within the broader Christian Reconstruction



movement. But Gothard and the IBLP, unlike many of their fellow organizations, do not appear to be looking for Christian allies in their quest. On the secular front, they alone seem to have accomplished more toward their end goal than most of their Christian Reconstructionist contemporaries, and the profit-making aspects of this large-scale venture cannot be underestimated.

The strategy, in this sense, has proved to be ingenious. After all, who wants to argue with “character”? What kind of person would object to such an innocuous-sounding concept? Couldn’t we all benefit from having a bit more ethical character in the way that we conduct our day-to-day lives? Of course we could! And that’s precisely the reaction that both the IACC and the IBLP have bet on.

IBLP’s master plan appears to be well underway. That is, until inquiring minds finally begin to ask where, exactly, all of this is headed. What, pray tell, lies behind the smiling bears, elephants and zebras so ready and eager to deliver their character traits to you, your children and your community?

If they could talk, they might be able to tell you that all’s not well in the peaceable kingdom, no matter how innocent it might look at first glance.

SILJA J.A. TALVI is an *In These Times* senior editor. She is currently working on a book about women and prisons, to be published by Seal Press. Research support for this article was provided by the Investigative Fund of The Nation Institute.

Snap, Crackle ... Patents

Can you patent the business method of selling cereal?

One company gave it a shot

BY CHRISTOPHER HAYES

BACK IN 2000, DAVID ROTH had one of those “eureka” moments that are the stuff of American entrepreneurial legend. After spotting a box of Cocoa Puffs hidden behind the desk of a Wall Street executive, Roth dreamed up a retail business that would sell cereal all the time. He and a partner opened the first Cereality in Tempe, Arizona, on the campus of Arizona State University. College students flocked; Roth followed up with stores in Philadelphia and Chicago; and news outlets from *Time* to CNN fawned.

But as is so often the case with good ideas, Roth wasn't the only one to have it. Across the country, Rocco Monteleone was getting set to open Bowls, a cereal cafe in Gainesville, Florida, (near the University of Florida) when he found out that Cereality had beaten him to the punch. OK, he figured, no harm, no foul: It's America. Anyone can open a restaurant selling cereal. Right?

Well, kind of. In May, Monteleone received a letter from Cereality's attorney warning him that he may be in violation of a patent application the company had filed for its “methods and system” of selling cereal. These included: “displaying and mixing competitively branded food products” and adding “a third portion of liquid.”

Cuckoo for patent law

Just 10 years ago, this kind of a patent would have been impossible even to consider. But a landmark shift in the law has made it possible to patent entire ways of doing business—a change that has prompted a rush on patent claims, opened a Pandora's Box of litigation and threatens to put large swaths of Ameri-

can innovation under the control of big business. Given the transition from an industrial to digital economy, changes in patent law were inevitable and necessary. But critics argue that when it comes to business methods the traditional rationales for granting patents—they incentivize expensive research and encourage inventors to share their knowledge—don't apply.

“You need incentives for people to innovate in technology,” says Jason Schultz, an attorney with the Electronic Frontier Foundation's Patent Busting project. “You've never needed that in businesses because if a business is successful you make money. It's its own incentive.”

When the first U.S. patent board convened in 1790, with Thomas Jefferson serving as one of the members, it required inventors to submit a miniature model of their invention. The board expected to issue patents for machines and industrial processes, things like cotton gins or the proverbial “better mouse trap” that were the engine of American economic growth. And for the first 200 years of the country's history, that's pretty much what they did.

But over the last three decades the category of patentable subject matter has expanded significantly beyond the widgets of the industrial age: In 1980, the Supreme Court decided that life-forms such as bacteria were patentable; soon thereafter the United States Patent and Trade Office (USPTO) began issuing patents for isolated genes, and in 1998, in the landmark case *State Street Bank v. Signature Financial Group, Inc.*, the Third Circuit Court of Appeals ruled business methods patentable as well.

Signature had secured a patent for software it had developed that managed its system of pooled mutual fund

assets. State Street used a similar system and when Signature told them to knock it off, State Street challenged the patent. A lower court sided with State Street, striking down the patent. Because it was software, the court ruled it was, at base, a mathematical algorithm, which the courts had traditionally viewed as an unpatentable “abstract idea.” Also, since Signature's entire business depended on the value of the mutual funds, the software qualified as a “business method,” which, since 1908, courts had also viewed as unpatentable. But the Third Circuit disagreed and ruled that as long as a given business method or software produced a “useful, concrete, and tangible” result—in this case the numerical value of the pooled mutual funds—it was suitable for a patent.

The decision came just as Internet commerce was exploding, and the USPTO, taking its marching orders from the courts, began issuing patents for everything from the hyperlink to the pop-up window to a “method of effecting commerce in a networked computer environment in a computerized system.” In an early seminal case, Amazon patented its “one-click” method of purchasing products, which forced Barnes and Noble to add an extra-neous click to its own system to avoid a lawsuit. Between 1997 and 2001, the number of business method patent applications increased twenty-fold, and the litigation associated with patent infringements exploded.





A Cereologist at work

Patent thickets

Schultz argues that conferring monopolies on certain business methods stifles competition and creates artificially high prices for consumers, since competitors must pay licensing fees to the patent holder. And since violations are enforced by the patent holder, the system benefits those with the resources to hire good lawyers.

"Let's say you get a patent on something like a pop-up window," says Schultz. "Of course, you could, in theory, go after everyone on the Internet, but you don't. What you end up doing is picking off the weak members of the herd, companies that don't have the money to defend themselves or independent Web sites, or occasionally big companies that you think will not have very much backbone and will quickly settle."

The proliferation of business method patents creates, in Schultz's words, "patent thickets," areas of e-commerce so overgrown with patents they discourage anyone but the largest corporations from wading in. For all of these reasons, Europe, Japan and Canada do not allow business method patents.

Just four short years after the *State Street* decision, mounting criticism led the USPTO to tighten the scrutiny it applied to business method patents. While it reduced the percentage of business

method applications it accepts, it has also continued to expand the domain of patentable subject matter, ruling earlier this year that business method patents don't need to have a technological component in order to be patented. If these rules had applied for the last century, there conceivably could have been patents on everything from drive-thru fast food to overnight shipping.

If a tussle over Lucky Charms and Froot Loops seems like low stakes, consider that it's just one small part of a growing trend toward privatizing more and more of what free culture proponents refer to as the "knowledge commons." Kembrew McLeod, author of *Freedom of Expression* (and holder of a trademark for the phrase "Freedom of Expression"), says "whether we're talking about genes in patent law or what is essentially the elimination of the public domain with the extension of copyright," in the last 25 years the entire intellectual property (IP) regime has moved toward "creating new private property."

McLeod says the shift started happening "around the same time the U.S. government and the business interests were finally coming to terms with the fact that IP exports exceeded manufacturing exports. The reason we've seen the shift is simply because there's so much money at stake."

The few voices advocating a less rigidly privatized sphere of knowledge constitute an unlikely coalition of free-market libertarians, who view things like business method patents as odious forms of state interference with natural competition, and progressive "copyleft" and free culture activists. "The real quandary is whether business method patents are ultimately good for business or not," says Nicholas Reville, of the free culture group Downhill Battle. "They enrich specific, usually entrenched companies—which is what gets the Bush administration excited—but they are terrible for the economy as a whole because they reduce competition and add an incredible legal strain on innovators."

While groups like the Electronic Frontier Foundation, FreeCulture and Downhill Battle are growing, intellectual property issues still don't command the same kind of attention as other progressive mainstays. But if the public doesn't start agitating for reform, Americans are going to find themselves increasingly at the whim of the large corporations who own the ideas that form the foundation of the American economy.

As long as the laws (and their interpretation) stay the same, businesses like Cereality will continue to protect their competitive advantage by any legal means possible. Back at Bowls, Monteleone's lawyer told him to ignore Cereality's letter, which was probably good advice. In August, the USPTO issued a provisional ruling rejecting the application. Cereality's spokesperson, Lisa Kovitz, could hardly muster a defense of the patent, saying that the company was instead focusing on its trademarks of the various aspects of the store's branding, which include the name "Cereologists" for its pajama-clad employees, and the name "Moo Machines" for its milk dispensers.

This may prove more effective: A cereal store set to open in Iowa City decided to change its name from Cereology to the Cereal Cabinet after receiving a letter from Cereality's attorneys. But name aside, Cereal Cabinet proprietor Ahmad Choudhry thinks his idea can't miss. As he told the local paper: "I've talked to so many other people, so many other students, and they all are very excited about this concept." ■

CHRISTOPHER HAYES is a senior editor at *In These Times*. He is currently working on an essay on solidarity for the next issue.

The Republican Crack-Up

Bush's bad year has created a political vacuum. Who will fill it?

BY DAVID MOBERG

SHORTLY AFTER HIS REELECTION, GEORGE Bush bragged that he had bags full of political capital for his second term. But Bush both miscounted the political coins in his pocket and blew his wad on some bad gambles, such as the war in Iraq and Social Security privatization. Then he lost more with the bad luck, largely of his own making, of a botched response to Hurricane Katrina.

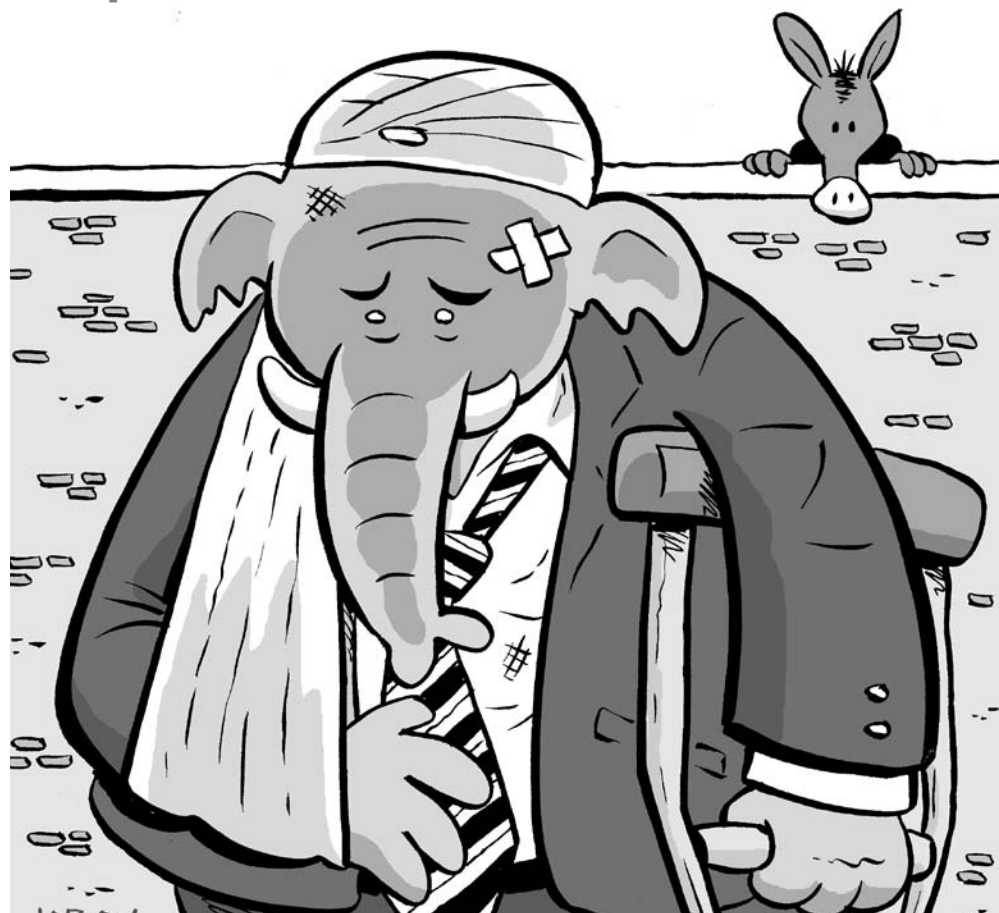
By late November [FC], he was less popular than Clinton, Reagan or Eisenhower was at any point in their second terms, with his approval ratings down in the mid-30 percents. On the two leading issues for voters—the war in Iraq and the economy—his ratings were even worse.

And despite hard-core loyalty from the Republican base, there are signs of disaffection from both moderates and the party's far right, including anti-government budget-cutters and anti-immigrant militants. Cracks have even emerged in the previously impregnable Republican Congressional political machine over both scandals and strategy. "The hopeful sign is that on all kinds of fronts where Republicans hoped to be united and victorious, they're now defensive and dis-united," says Roger Hickey, co-director of the progressive advocacy group Campaign for America's Future (CAF).

Crucial missteps

Bush's *annus horribilis* was partly the result of fundamentally flawed policies playing themselves out. It also reflected the breakdown of a duplicitous strategy to push through policies that a majority of Americans never supported and often misunderstood, as political scientists Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson argue in their recent book, *Off Center*. But it also resulted from the grassroots pressure of progressives and —when they finally sensed Bush's weakness—some better-late-than-never political discipline from Democrats.

There were two turning points. First, his disastrous handling of Hurricane Katrina reinforced a view of Bush as out of touch



with ordinary people and undermined his claim to elementary competence. With American poverty and governmental inadequacy so flagrantly on display, Republicans had to indefinitely postpone the vote on one of their favorite causes—permanent repeal of the estate tax.

Then, the 2,000th death of American soldiers in Iraq crystallized Americans' frustration with a war that a growing majority thinks should not have been fought—and that Bush misled them into supporting. Bush is losing support on the war not only from the left and center—most notably, in the resounding call for withdrawal from traditionally hawkish Rep. John Murtha (D-Pa.)—but also from his right. Two-thirds of self-described conservative Republicans told *Washington Post* pollsters they had doubts about

the war.

Equally important to Bush's collapse was the defeat in the public arena—without a vote even being taken—of his primary domestic initiative: privatization of Social Security. The more Bush talked about it, the less support it got. But that never would have happened without a sustained and disciplined grassroots campaign led by Americans United to Protect Social Security, consisting of unions, especially AFSCME (public employees), CAF and USAction (a coalition of statewide citizen groups). In Bush's first week on the hustings for privatization, they directly challenged him in Fargo, Billings, Omaha, Little Rock and Tampa, all cities in red states where he had hoped to pressure Democratic legislators to back his plan. "These are not places of progressive strength," says USAction di-

rector Jeff Blum, “but they became places where people on our side were looking to fight back. We gave them a message.”

With the floodgates open, more discontent poured out. Democrats won governor’s races in New Jersey and Virginia, making significant gains in exurbs where Republicans thought they ruled. Older Americans on Medicare were infuriated with the complex Medicare prescription plan, a giveaway to the drug and insurance industries that Republicans hoped would win them seniors’ votes. And the blow-up over Harriet Miers’ Supreme Court nomination underscored the Bush administration’s weakness for incompetent cronies. The right won the Republicans’ internal fight over Miers with the subsequent nomination of Samuel Alito, but with Bush weakened and Alito’s deeply conservative views becoming public, Democratic senators may be emboldened to make a fight over his nomination.

Blatant corruption

The growing scandals from the White House to Congress are most significant as indicators of how lawlessly the right wing has fought for power. The outing of CIA agent Valerie Plame was at its heart an attempt to hide the false rationales proffered for invading Iraq. The pending trial of (now former) house majority leader Tom DeLay for money-laundering grew out of his strategy to use corporate money in a scheme to redistrict the state and eliminate five Democratic congressmen—even though Bush Justice Department experts unanimously concluded that the plan violated the Voting Rights Act.

Bad as they are, the scandals involving superlobbyist Jack Abramoff, or Rep. Duke Cunningham—who pleaded guilty and resigned from Congress—are more conventional, if grandly greedy, abuses of influence. The widespread involvement of industry lobbyists in writing Republican legislation, like the energy or bankruptcy bills, is far more troublesome.

Politically, the scandals may make some seemingly secure races more competitive. For example, shortly after Thanksgiving, Ohio Rep. Bob Ney (R-Ohio) was confronted by four ads placed by CAF in the *Columbus Dispatch*, linking him to Abramoff, DeLay and others in the casino money-for-influence scandal. Such reminders may make Ney’s re-election more difficult.

Republicans recognize that vulnerability:

Party leaders in the House allowed Ney to be one of 14 Republicans to vote in November against the House Republican budget cuts in Medicaid, student loans and child support enforcement in their budget reconciliation bill. But his Cleveland-area colleague, Steve LaTourette, who had told lobbyists that he would vote against the “lousy” legislation, was pressured into helping to pass the bill by two votes. His constituents were snowed in that day, he explained, so

they wouldn’t notice his vote.

Republicans like Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, under investigation for suspicious stock trading, should be especially vulnerable to corruption charges, since they claim to be the party of values, religion and morality. But the scandals aren’t at the top of voters’ reasons for condemning Republicans. According to a late November Democracy Corps poll, nationally, Americans favor a generic Democratic Congressman over a generic Republican by a 47 to 41 margin, more because of the substance of Republican policies than their “culture of corruption.”

Forcing unpopular policies

For example, the cuts in food stamps, Medicaid and student loans in the \$50 billion House budget reconciliation bill were sold as offsetting the cost of Katrina relief. In reality, though, they were needed to pay for part of a planned \$70 billion tax cut—much of it future capital gains and dividend cuts that benefit the rich. Republicans separated the two bills—and even deferred voting on the House tax cuts right after passing their reconciliation bill—to avoid the link. But the Emergency Campaign for American Priorities (ECAP), largely a reincarnation of the coalition that fought Social Security privatization, connected the two bills. According to Hart Research polling, two-thirds of voters thought the package of tax and budget cuts was a bad idea, including 55 percent of white evangelicals.

“We’ve stolen their moral thunder,” says Alan Charney, political director of USAction and ECAP coordinating committee

chair. “We’re talking in very moral terms, and it has resonated: Don’t cut American priorities to pay for tax cuts for the rich.”

The House reconciliation bill narrowly passed, with united Democratic opposition and splintered Republican support, but the prospects looked bad for a compromise that would keep Republicans together on the much different Senate bill—especially as Republicans continue to push policies that are unpopular with most Americans,

The growing scandals from the White House to Congress are most significant as indicators of how lawlessly the right wing has fought for power.

and don’t even work to boot.

Take the economy, for example. More than three-fifths of those polled told Gallup in mid-November that economic conditions were only fair or poor, and nearly the same percentage thought they were getting worse. They’re largely right: The recovery has been anemic compared to past business cycles; real income is down for most workers. And Bush’s tax and budget policies, along with issues he champions, such as weaker unions and corporate globalization, play a major role in fostering the growing inequality.

As Hacker and Pierson detail so well, Republicans have constructed a juggernaut designed to deliver such unpopular programs but protect themselves politically. But while they describe the political mechanics of class warfare, they present the problem as the “center” having lost its power. Needed electoral reforms, however, can’t happen until progressives gain power.

Democrats should note that the primary prescription for “bootstrapping” victory over Republican distortions of the electoral system is a stronger labor movement. Indeed, the fundamental problem, more than a weakened center, is that the Democrats have not devised a political response to the class warfare Republicans wage on behalf of the rich and the corporations. It is not an impossible task: On most counts, large majorities of Americans would be with them, if, like Dorothy’s companions on the road to Oz, they only had enough courage, heart and brains. ■

DAVID MOBERG is a senior editor at *In These Times*.



To Leave or Not to Leave

Parsing the plans for “victory” in Iraq.

BY MARK LEVINE

IN THE LEAD-UP TO THE invasion of Iraq, President Bush told the world, “We will remain in Iraq as long as necessary, and not a day more.” But as is always the case in politics, the devil is in the details.

When will it no longer be necessary for the United States to maintain troops in Iraq? And what does “withdrawing troops” actually mean—all troops or just most troops?

According to Bush’s newly released “National Strategy for Victory in Iraq,” the most important goal of our presence in Iraq is to “help people defeat the terrorists and build a democratic inclusive state.” But if by terrorism we mean the systematic threatening, torturing and/or killing of civilians to force them to accept a political or military situation they wouldn’t otherwise sanction, then the United States has committed far more acts of terrorism and crimes against humanity than the insurgents in Iraq (with perhaps more than 100,000 dead Iraqi civilians and hundreds of billions of dol-

lars in destruction and counting).

Equally troubling, the plan argues that “failure in Iraq will embolden terrorists and expand their reach. ... The fate of the greater Middle East, which will have a profound and lasting impact on American security, hangs in the balance.” By these terms, there is little chance of U.S. pullout from Iraq any time soon, since by the Defense Department’s own reckoning, the insurgency could last well over a decade.

Numerous flaws in the administration’s analysis of its current policy will also keep the United States in Iraq for many years before what the president has termed “complete” or “total” victory can be achieved. In highlighting three tracks that the administration deems essential to winning the war—political, security and economic—the president’s plan fails to acknowledge that for most Iraqis it is the United States—not the “insurgency”—that is the primary “enemy” in the country; that U.S. policies of “clear, hold and build” have largely failed in all three

areas; and that the neoliberal economic program it has imposed cannot “reform, restore and build” an Iraqi economy that, whatever its many faults, was the envy of the developing world before the first Gulf War and the subsequent sanctions and invasions.

Indeed, in the almost three years since the current invasion, the United States has been unable to rebuild much—if not most—of the infrastructure it destroyed, while the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) and its Iraqi clients have inspired contempt from Iraqis with regard to the “reforms, transparency and accountability” described as crucial for the country’s development. At the same time, by demonizing Iraq’s insurgents as “perverse” and “against humanity,” the Bush administration has precluded the possibility of a negotiated settlement and full withdrawal of U.S. forces.

Most alternatives fall short

If the president’s latest strategic tweak- ing of U.S. goals and tactics in Iraq is

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worrisome, few of the alternative plans by Democrats and their allies are much better. On the official level, perhaps the most prominent statement by a “liberal hawk” was Sen. Joseph Biden’s (D-Del.) November 21 remarks to the Council on Foreign Relations, in which he accused the Bush administration of “misrepresenting the facts, misunderstanding Iraq, and misleading on the war.” While this is

the views of the Bush administration: a long-term military presence and the ability to direct, profit from and control other countries’ (especially China’s) access to Iraq’s immense petroleum reserves as the world enters the age of Peak Oil.

The most comprehensive plan offered by the Democratic establishment is from two members of the moderate Center for American Progress. Titled “Strategic Re-

It seems that few if any elite members of the U.S. political establishment will support Rep. John Murtha’s calls for the explicit “termination” of the U.S. presence in Iraq.

no doubt true, Biden hardly does a better job of reflecting the situation in Iraq.

The reason is that his framework is the same as the president’s: “preserving America’s fundamental interests”—or, as he rephrased it later in his speech, our “core interests”—in Iraq. Since he never explicitly states what those are, it makes it difficult to define a strategy much different than that of the White House. Biden’s rhetoric of “realism” is no less troubling than Bush’s “grandiose goals.” Biden argues that “Iraq will not become a model democracy any time soon,” and that because of this, we need to “refocus” our mission on preserving America’s fundamental goals. In fact, however, the one level on which Iraq is enjoying a measure of success is in building the infrastructure of formal democratic practice. After all, can we say for sure that our last two presidential elections were fairer than Iraq’s?

Biden argues that America’s fundamental goals are to stop Iraq from being a haven for terrorists and to prevent a full-blown civil, and ultimately regional, war. But we’ve already lost on the first count, while on the second our continued presence will likely catalyze, rather than slow, the march toward regional anarchy.

These dynamics help explain the strong similarities between Bush’s plan and Biden’s three-pronged alternative—forging a political settlement, strengthening the Iraqi government’s capabilities through reconstruction and services, and accelerating our training of Iraqi forces. This is not surprising if we assume that America’s “core interests” as stated (but not explicitly defined) by Biden are similar to

deployment: A Progressive Plan for Iraq and the Struggle Against Violent Extremists,” and written by former Reagan Defense official Lawrence Korb and Brian Katulis, the plan has one major virtue: It admits that “most Iraqis do not want us there and they do not feel our presence makes them safer.”

In a more explicit and far-reaching version of Biden’s vision, this plan calls for 80,000 U.S. troops to be redeployed by the end of 2006, most home, although many to Afghanistan and “other hot spots around the globe.” Significantly, the plan asserts that “by the end of 2007, the only U.S. military forces in Iraq would be a small Marine contingent to protect the U.S. embassy, military advisers to the Iraqi government and counterterrorist units working with Iraqi forces.” This sounds like a big improvement over Bush’s open-ended commitment of more than 100,000 troops, but it’s disturbingly close to our position in Colombia or the Philippines, which helps to perpetuate oppressive practices in the name of stability and fighting terrorism.

A bigger problem, however, is that the plan still defines the main object of U.S. policy as “most effectively defeating our enemies.” There is no discussion of how U.S. policies produced a situation where our enemies can prosper, even as it admits that attacks have skyrocketed under the Bush administration. But without this historical context, a successful plan against the insurgency and the larger problem of terrorism cannot be developed.

Similarly, when Korb and Katulis criticize Bush administration policy for

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“remain[ing] the same,” the authors refer merely to counter-terrorism policy, not the larger policies whose sameness across a host of administrations is at the root of today’s terrorist threat. When it refers to the “lack of information” at the disposal of the American people, it refers merely to military information, not to the horrendous state of ignorance of most Americans about our foreign policy and its consequences in the Middle East for decades. Indeed, most Muslims know this history far better than most Americans.

One example cited by the authors demonstrates the context their analysis lacks. They argue that “earlier this year, Sheikh Jawad al-Kalesi, a leading Shiite cleric in Baghdad, asserted that Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was killed long ago, but that the United States was continuing the ‘ploy’ of using al-Zarqawi as an excuse to continue the occupation and a pretext to stay in Iraq. The United States does not do enough to counter these distortions of the facts.” I met with Sheikh Jawad when I was in Iraq last year. He was among the most open and honest of the religious leaders I came across, and certainly the least hateful toward the United States. He stressed the importance of finding nonviolent ways to resist the occupation, unlike his Sunni counterparts I met, who blithely discussed “killing every infidel” to get the United States out of Iraq. Sheikh Jawad’s views about Zarqawi, if not intended sarcastically, were likely meant to reflect the view of many Iraqis, who believe that Zarqawi serves American interests so well that if he didn’t exist the United States would have had to invent him.

If Sheikh Jawad is spreading “myths and conspiracy theories,” their roots lie deep in the Green Zone. Comparing him to terrorists who use the media to “disseminate targeted messages” misses the huge difference between the moderate Shia establishment represented by Jawad and the radical foreign Sunni jihadis, who consider Shiites like him as much an enemy as occupation forces.

The power of simplicity

If the idea of “strategic redeployment” is problematic in many areas, the plan outlined by Pennsylvania Representative and 37-year Marine Corps veteran John Murtha is clearer, more pragmatic, and in one respect, profound: He calls simply

for a coherent “exit strategy” that would bring *all* the troops home in the near future. Specifically, he argued in November, “Staying the course in Iraq is not an option or a policy. I believe we must begin discussions for an immediate redeployment of U.S. forces from Iraq. I believe it can be accomplished in as little as six months but it must be consistent with the safety of U.S. troops. We must insist that the Iraqis step up and seize their own destiny.”

Murtha’s no-nonsense stance comes from his realization that “the future of the U.S. military is at risk” via its extended presence in Iraq. Crucially, “the original plan to win the peace was flawed.

The best way to force a debate about withdrawal is to force the political establishment to come clean about America’s true long-term plans for the U.S. military in Iraq.

Two and a half years later, the indices that would determine the ultimate success of a stable Iraq have not improved ... we have lost the hearts and minds of the Iraqi peoples.” In response, his plan, offered as a Joint Resolution in the House of Representatives on November 17, is: 1) to immediately redeploy U.S. troops consistent with the safety of U.S. forces; 2) to create a quick reaction force in the region; 3) to create an over-the-horizon presence of Marines; and 4) to diplomatically pursue security and stability in Iraq.

The White House immediately denounced Murtha’s plan. Just as telling was the negative reaction to it from Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (although she’s since moved closer to his position), Sen. John Kerry and Sen. Biden. It seems that few if any elite member of the U.S. political establishment will support Murtha’s calls for the explicit “termination” of the U.S. presence in Iraq. Moreover, it seems that the leadership on both sides of the aisle have come together to tamp down any serious push for a full withdrawal.

Perhaps sensing this dynamic, this past summer Rep. Barbara Lee (D-Calif.) offered the simplest plan for turning the tide of the war. On June 30, Lee introduced a bill that states it is “the policy of the United States not to enter into any

base agreements with the government of Iraq that would lead to a permanent United States military presence in Iraq.” (See “Permanent Occupation,” October 24.)

Several dozen sponsors have joined since the bill was introduced. Its aim is “to simply codify the sentiments expressed by the president and the secretary of defense that we will not have a permanent military presence in Iraq.” But it is clear that Lee and other progressive legislators, such as Rep. Lynn Woolsey (D-Calif.), understand that the administration has little intention of leaving Iraq soon if it can avoid doing so. Indeed, Condoleezza Rice refused to say that the United States

would withdraw completely within 10 years. One senior aide to a senator on the Armed Services Committee described to me an angry phone call his boss received from the Pentagon after he publicly pushed a general in testimony to provide a date, no matter how far into the future, when he could say that U.S. forces would leave the country.

In such an environment, simplicity is the best option for politicians and activists seeking to begin a process of withdrawing all U.S. forces from Iraq. The longer and more detailed the plan, the more likely it falls into the very political, ideological and strategic traps that have made such a mess of the occupation to begin with.

For now, the best way to force a debate about withdrawal is to force the political establishment to come clean about America’s true long-term plans for the U.S. military in Iraq. Once Americans understand that there really is no exit plan *per se*, the calls to define one will grow louder and more emphatic, here and in Iraq. ■

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BY AMERICA VERA-ZAVALA

Evo Morales Has Plans for Bolivia

Evo Morales is a polarizing figure in Latin American politics: a proudly left-leaning indigenous activist who defends the traditional rights of peasants to grow coca and describes the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas as "colonization." While opponents have labelled him a "narco-trade unionist," the charismatic Morales enjoys widespread popular support. As In These Times went to press, he was expected to win the special December 18 Bolivian presidential election. His election would place him in power alongside other Latin American leaders who are critical of America's neoliberal economic agenda: Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, Lula de Silva of Brazil and, of course, Fidel Castro in Cuba.

MORALES' UPBRINGING SHAPED his political philosophy. The son of coca farmers, he was raised in the barren altiplano region, where he worked as a coca farmer and llama herder before rising to power as the national leader of the coca-growers union. In 1995, he founded MAS (Movimiento al Socialismo), an indigenous-based political party that calls for the nationalization of industry, legalization of the coca leaf (the main ingredient of cocaine) and fairer distribution of national resources. Morales ran for president in 2002 on the MAS ticket, losing to the heavily favored Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada by two percentage points.

A major plank in his current platform is to convene a "constituent assembly," that would re-write the country's Constitution with input from the indigenous groups that make up approximately 62 percent of the population, but who only won the right to vote in 1952. Morales is an Aymara Indian, and many observers note that MAS has successfully brought together two strands of the left—the indigenous and the liberal—in one party.

The political climate in Bolivia is tense. This presidential election comes after June protests against an oil export deal that forced the resignation of then-President Carlos Mesa. These protests were only the most recent: In 2000, protests in the city of Cochabamba stopped the IMF-mandated privatiza-

tion of the public water system, and in 2003 protests erupted in La Paz over a tax increase aimed at the poor. If Morales wins less than 50 percent of the popular vote, the election will be decided by a congressional vote in January, and critics say that he has moved to the center in an attempt to win. But when *In These Times* spoke with Morales in early November, he was sporting a Che Guevara t-shirt, and his resolve to equalize access to the country's resources was clear.

What is the most important issue that you plan to address as president?

The most important thing is to create public well-being, to combat poverty and take care of our natural resources. To form a government is to form a family that will work together to eliminate poverty. In this project the state has to be a central actor, generating development, housing, sports and so on.

The state has to be the motor: We will nationalise the forests and the petroleum and natural gas reserves. In several cases the management of the companies has been disastrous. To develop the country, we have to get rid of the colonial and neoliberal model. We want to tax the transnationals in a fair way, and redistribute the money to the small- and medium-size enterprises, where the job opportunities

and ideas are. To get this on its way, we want to create a development bank. The properties of big land owners will have to be redistributed; we'll respect the productive land, but the unproductive land must be handed out to landless peasants—this will start a true process of economic redistribution. We also want to industrialize and give people more access to technology.

We want to govern with our indigenous ancestors' models: That means a different concept of participation, community work and honesty.

How important is the Constituent Assembly?

The Constituent Assembly is our number one priority and main proposal in the campaign. The majority of people in this country—people from more than 30 indigenous groups—did not participate in the foundation of Bolivia in 1825. We have to re-found Bolivia in order to end the colonial state, to live united in diversity, to put all our resources under state control, and to make people participate and give them the right to make decisions.

If I become president, I have to swear



RODRIGO BUENDIA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES



to respect the laws—and if the laws are neoliberal, I can't do that. Our constitution says that Bolivia is a multiethnic democratic country, but that is only in theory. If we win we have to change the country, not only in theory but in reality.

What will the process of transforming political representation look like?

We would like to have elections for the Constituent Assembly six months after these [December] elections. Bolivians will elect three people from each district, which would constitute a parliament of around 200 members. Then the assembly will have to work for some months, after which their proposals will be voted on in a public referendum.

But we have to see how this goes. The minority in this country are not going to give up the baby bottle easily.

What are you going to do about Bolivia's external debt?

We will ask for the total [forgiveness] of the debt, negotiating with the World Bank and the IMF. We are looking into the possibility of presenting a demand that Bolivia be compensated for genocide and 500 years of oppression and violations of human rights. It would be a historic thing to do, especially for an indigenous government.

How about the world outside Bolivia? What do you think about what is happening in Latin America right now?

I respect Cuba a lot. When it comes to Che Guevara, our only difference is the armed struggle—I don't accept armed struggle. Maybe it was the way in the '50s and '60s, but we want a democratic revolution.

There are many progressive leaders in Latin America right now; presidents like Fidel and Chavez, but also Kirchner [in Argentina], Lula and Tabarez Vasquez [in Uruguay]. The social movements are very strong and interesting and they move from union struggle, to local, to national struggle. If the 19th century belonged to Europe and the 20th century to the United States, the 21st century will belong to America, to Latin America. I have a vision of integration, like the European Union, with a single market and a single currency and with the corporations subordinate to the state.

I am sure that America would be better off without the United States and the IMF controlling all of its resources.

Right now [in Bolivia], people power exists in theory, but not in practice. That has to change. If I become president Bolivia will support ALBA [Alternativa Bolivariana para las Américas], the alternative to FTAA that

was launched by Venezuela. Of course, everyone would like free trade but as long as the world is so unfair, free trade is not combating poverty but combating the poor.

What is your political history?

I have gone from social struggle, to trade union struggle, to local politics and then to national politics. I am candidate for president because the people want me to be. We are the most militant force against neoliberal politics. The trade union I was heading [the Federation of Coca Farmers] is in daily direct confrontation with the United States, which controls our country under the pretext of fighting against drug trafficking.

What many people don't understand is that the coca leaf is an important part of our culture. Zero cocaine cannot mean that zero people work with the coca leaf. Right now we have an international campaign to take the coca leaf off the United Nations list of drugs; the coca leaf is not a drug, it is a healthy herb.

What is your strategy to avoid confrontation with the United States?

They have to respect us, to respect the outcome of the elections. Recently, Bush has said that he will recognize the elections if they are fair.

Condoleezza Rice has said that she is "very worried" about you being president of Bolivia. What is your reaction to that?

That is part of intrusive U.S. politics: their constant threats, repression and lies. The White House says that I'm a drug trafficker who belongs to the mafia, that I receive money from Fidel and Chávez. Ridiculous! Luckily, the Bolivian people don't believe them.

Is there a risk that they will try to declare the elections unconstitutional if you win?

I have to concentrate on the campaign and trust what the constitutional court has said: that the elections are constitutional. ■

AMERICA VERA-ZAVALA is a Swedish journalist who writes regularly on economics and participatory democracy.



BY LAKSHMI CHAUDHRY

Postcards From the Front

In *Jarhead*, his memoir of the first Gulf War, Anthony Swofford writes, “[T]he men who go to war and live are spared for the single purpose of spreading the bad news when they return, the bad news about the way war is fought and why, and by

whom for whom.”

The news—bad or otherwise—contained in the recent flurry of soldier memoirs about this Iraq war is especially significant at a time when G. I. Joe has become the ultimate arbiter of legitimacy in the battle to define the truth about the war.

In media interviews and public appearances, the authors and military bloggers are asked the same questions: Can we win this war? Did the Bush administration have a post-invasion plan? Was the situation in Iraq worth going to war over? And, inevitably, should we just get the hell out?

But those who fight do not necessarily offer a higher truth about Iraq—or at least the kind that will help answer these difficult questions. The reality portrayed in these memoirs is personal and, for the

most part, self-confessedly unreliable. As one memoirist, Jason Christopher Hartley, warns his readers, “If you want news about Iraq, congratulations, you’ve come to the wrong fucking place!”

Rebels without a clue

Unlike previous generations of soldiers, these authors—with the exception of one—have little interest in pondering the “big picture.” The “truth” they offer about the war and its effects is incomplete, episodic and usually delivered in a tone borrowed from *Animal House*.

Colby Buzzell (*My War: Killing Time in Iraq*), Hartley (*Just Another Soldier: A Year on the Ground in Iraq*), and John Crawford (*The Last True Story I’ll Ever Tell: An Accidental Soldier’s Account of the War*

in Iraq) express the same adolescent contempt for authority. These rebels without a cause show no aspiration to be much else, even in the midst of combat. The result: a lot of unadorned, profanity-laced honesty but not much truth-telling.

Buzzell joins the military to escape a life of dead-end jobs, skateboarding and way too many drugs. A veteran in a bar makes the Marines sound like “joining a party frat with weapons that gave out paychecks,” and he’s sold, though he ends up in the infantry.

Strikingly self-absorbed and referencing movies non-stop, Buzzell seems to experience the war as a Hollywood flick in which he is the star. On combat missions, he listens to an iPod playlist named “My War,” with songs more likely chosen for their titles than their politics: “Kill ‘Em All,” Metallica; “Bombs over Baghdad,” Outkast; “Killing an Arab,” The Cure.

The war, in Buzzell’s book, appears as an extreme adventure tour, with his fellow soldiers as likely to whip out digital cameras as weapons. A mission to capture a top general of the *Fedayeen* almost goes awry when a camera flash goes off just before the raid begins. Readers looking for tales of heroism will instead find Buzzell’s gleeful account of how six guys in his company came under mortar attack on base while playing night volleyball under “bright as fuck” lights. Their minor shrapnel wounds earned each a Purple Heart.

National Guardsman John Crawford’s achievements include stealing a motorcycle from a hapless local, and shouting Christmas greetings at his “captive Muslim audience” at a traffic checkpoint because it was “entertaining to annoy them.”

Such cheerful irreverence in a war zone can oftentimes be read as callous indifference. Hartley describes standing guard on detainees arrested in various predawn raids, a duty that includes taking the “big rascals pee pee.” Soon, one of the “problem children” refuses to keep a blindfold on because of allergies that hurt his eyes. The situation escalates and Hartley loses it:

I put dickhead on his knees in the middle of his cell, removed the blindfold he was now wearing as a dashing olive-drab scarf, and wrapped the top of his head with about ten layers of hundred-mph tape. ... Our S-2 (in-

tel) master sergeant, a mean-spirited quasi-sadist, the full-time El Capitan of the jail ... kept saying, “Okay Sergeant, that’s enough tape. Okay, that’s enough.”

Hartley relents after a tearful apology from the prisoner. He owns up to feeling “stupid, petty and cowardly,” but gives no indication that he learned anything from the episode.

The slacker memoirs are often funny and sometimes insightful. For the most part, these are decent guys who loathe the bloodlust and common military incompetence that destroy so many lives. Their perspective, however, is blinkered by their need to stay in “character,” i.e., the smart-ass who refuses to take anything seriously, including the casualties of war. Even Hartley, who is more clued-in than his compatriots, can only express his unhappiness at the lopsided body count—“a near 1:3 ratio of dead evildoers to innocent and ridiculously poor Iraqis”—with flippancy: “It’s like we should have bumper stickers that read, ‘I ♥ DEAD CIVILIANS.’”

This “whatever, dude” detachment adds to the tunnel vision created by a war zone where the enemy is entirely unknown and rarely seen. Guys like Buzzell emerge from well-fortified operating bases to execute quick combat missions that largely consist of unleashing massive firepower on shadowy fighters, glimpsed intermittently between rounds. The rest of the time he works out, listens to music and watches movies. Such are the perks of fighting for a superpower.

Cardboard foes

In a combat zone marked by a vast cultural and linguistic divide between the soldiers and the Iraqis, “truth” depends on who is doing the telling. Hartley and Buzzell describe late-night raids as decisive operations where soldiers show up, storm through the front door, apprehend the “target individual,” search the house for weapons and head out. “Badda bing, badda boom,” writes Buzzell. Wailing women and kids warrant a mention—at times a pang of guilt—but remain in the background.

But when the Iraqi blogger Riverbend witnesses one such raid, it’s the woman’s humiliation that dominates the description:

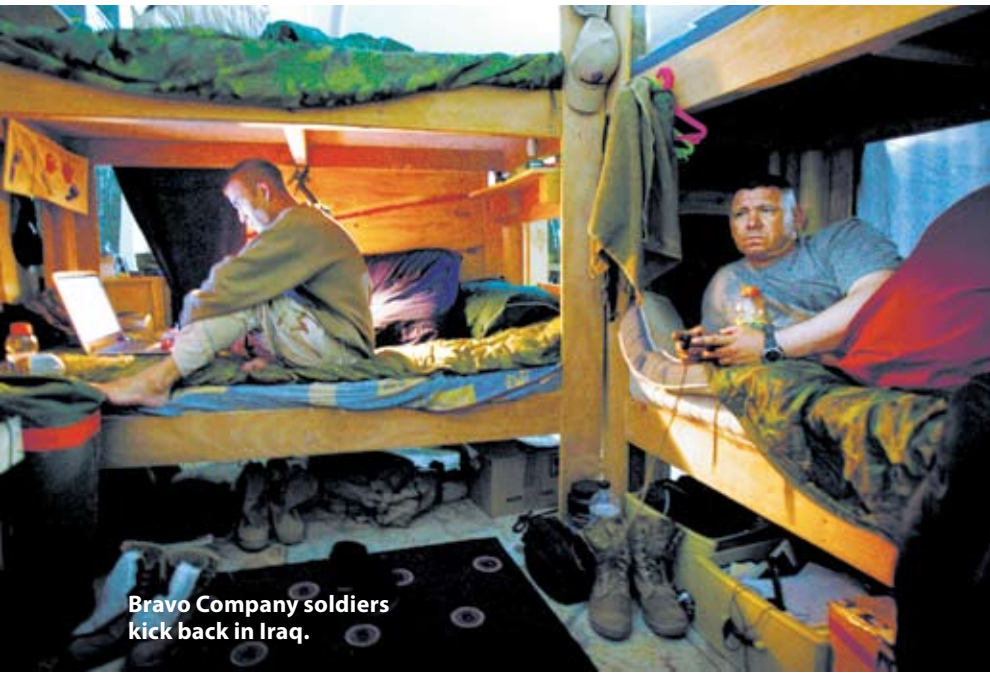
“I couldn’t see her face because her head was bent and her hair fell down around it. It was the first time I had seen her hair ... under normal circumstances, she wore a hijab. That moment I wanted to cry ... to scream ... to throw something at the chaos down the street. I could feel Reem’s humiliation as she stood there, head hanging with shame—exposed to the world, in the middle of the night.”

The authors of these memoirs know that Iraqis have a less flattering opinion of such actions, but they often seem too self-absorbed to care. Failing to “see” the Iraqis as people, the authors depict them as rote “Third World” types: good-hearted peasants; menacing mobs of angry locals; shy, sweet women and children; rascally street urchins; trusty shopkeepers or guides; and, of course, the “bad guys.”

Unhappy things happen when soldiers can’t peg an Iraqi as “good” or “evil.” The narrators struggle to read facial expressions and body language in tense situations, where someone can “look” angry one minute and welcoming the next. Any behavior less than unmistakably benign—loud offers of food or broad smiles—has the potential to be misinterpreted as threatening.

Even Kayla Williams (*Love My Rifle More Than You: Young and Female in the U.S. Army*), an Arab linguist who communicates military directives to the locals, fails to transcend stereotypes. Williams, a former sergeant in the 101st Airborne, credits her two-year relationship with an Arab ex-boyfriend for giving her “sympathy, understanding and respect for the people of Iraq.” And she is more sensitive than an 18-year-old American kid who doesn’t understand the Iraqi tendency to come up close and speak loudly. Yet the bulk of her translations are directed at the Iraqis, not for them. When Iraqis express anger and frustration, she offers platitudes—or in one case, a bag of Skittles—and walks away. More unforgivably, in at least one instance, Williams doesn’t bother to refute a colonel’s mistaken assumption that a group of seriously injured Iraqis—a.k.a. “ragheads”—were trying to kill his men.

But *Love My Rifle* is more about Williams—her battles with low self-esteem and sexual harassment, fraught relationships with incompetent female superior officers and male soldiers—than the war



Bravo Company soldiers kick back in Iraq.

DAVID FURST/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

itself. For Williams, this war isn't about oil, terrorism, democracy or kicking ass for the U.S. of A. It's about *them*—their self-image, their needs, their emotions. This is war in the "Real World," not the real world, where the fate of nations and people hang in the balance.

A broader perspective

The one writer who defies this navel-gazing is Nathaniel Fick (*One Bullet Away: The Making of a Marine Officer*), who joined the Marine Corps to serve his country: "[I]t was a last bastion of honor in society, a place where young Americans learned to work as a team, to trust one another and themselves, and to sacrifice for a principle."

Fick is all that we would want our soldiers to be: decent, thoughtful, responsible and brave. Unlike Buzzell, who picks the infantry because his "heart was dead set on pulling a trigger," he opts for the First Recon Battalion whose primary goal is to gather information, not "spray and pray." It's a special kind of Marine who returns from a triumphant tour of duty in Afghanistan only to be disappointed by jingoism at home: "Flag waving, tough talk, a yellow ribbon on every bumper. I didn't see any interest in understanding the war on the ground. No one acknowledged that the fight would be long and dirty, and that maybe the enemy had courage and ideals, too."

Unlike his fellow memoirists, Fick

cares deeply about military strategy and winning the war. Though he is no antiwar activist, he has been vocal in his criticism of Bush's Iraq policy in his various media appearances. *One Bullet Away* documents the incompetence of his commanding officer, the lack of post-invasion planning and lopsided military priorities that forced him "to accept senior officers' decisions, regardless of their stupidity, criminality, or inhumanity."

One such criminal decision occurs when everyone inside an airport field is declared hostile. Fick's men end up shooting two teenage boys. Describing his fight to ensure the boys get proper medical attention, Fick makes clear the real reasons for his altruism: Dead kids are bad for morale.

Fighting (this war), for me, meant two things: winning and getting my men home alive. Alive, though, set the bar too low. I had to get them physically and psychologically intact. They had to know that, whether or not they supported the larger war, they had fought their little piece of it with honor and had retained their humanity.

Those two goals—winning and taking care of his men—may have been compatible when the victory was defined as the ouster of Saddam Hussein. Today the mission is nothing less than bringing peace and democracy to Iraq. Within this context, the death of an Iraqi boy repre-

sents a decisive defeat, irrespective of its toll on our soldiers. The low priority that military policy has assigned to Iraqi life throughout this war is exactly what fuels the insurgency.

Since publication, Fick has suggested a shift in military strategy, advocating for "green zones" in Iraq where the people's "security and comfort are our first priority." But there are few signs, judging by these memoirs, that our soldiers have the training to take on such an unprecedented task—a task complicated by their inability to distinguish between friend and foe in a war whose frontlines run through the streets, backyards and bedrooms of ordinary Iraqis.

At war with ourselves?

Nearly three years into this conflict, the only military objective Americans can agree on is the welfare of our troops. Since Vietnam, the prime directive of American war-making has been protecting "our sons and daughters in the military." This is why Bush speaks almost exclusively at military bases and veteran gatherings. It is also why the antiwar movement as of late speaks less of the war's spurious rationales than of its effects on the soldiers. Morale, body armor, casualty numbers—these are the new buzzwords of post-invasion activism, whose most recognizable face is Cindy Sheehan, the mother of a dead soldier. The Iraqis have become an afterthought.

In *Jarhead*, during an argument with a German tourist, Swofford stumbles upon the fatal flaw in all national narratives of war:

[T]he problem with believing your country's battle monuments and deaths are more important than those of other nations is that the enemy disappears ... the heroes from one's own country are no longer believed to have fought against a national enemy but simply with other heroes ...

In our stories of this war—including these memoirs—it is the Iraqi people who have disappeared, rendered invisible in a war fought ostensibly on their behalf. Who will speak their truth of this war? More importantly, who will listen? ■

LAKSHMI CHAUDHRY is a senior editor at *In These Times*. Her blog, "The L-Files," can be read at www.alternet.org/blogs/lfiles/.

MIXED MEDIA

The Northern Slave Trade

Americans excel at ego-boosting myths of exceptionalism: It's our ingenuity, energy and can-do attitude that explain our rise from frontier to world power. But what if slavery were the real secret of our success?

We like to condemn slavery as an exotic evil perpetrated by plantation Southerners, but two new books and a museum exhibit provide nightmarish reminders that slavery was the norm in the early years of this country, and that up through the eve of the Civil War, Northern bankers, brokers and entrepreneurs were among slavery's staunchest defenders.

In *Complicity*, a team of *Hartford Courant* journalists investigates this history, producing 10 stories that explore how deeply the fortunes of New York and New England were tied to the slave trade. "Slavery in New York," an exhibit at the New York Historical Society through March 5, reveals New York

as a city substantially built by slaves. The companion book of the same name, elegantly designed and illustrated, anchors the exhibit in a series of scholarly essays. Together, these works echo and amplify each other, providing a kind of surround-sound opportunity for an anguished identity crisis: If our supposedly freedom-loving forebears were not "good guys," what were they? And what are we?

From the get-go, Americans were profiteers, and plundering the New World was backbreaking work. Writing in 1645 to John Winthrop, governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, his brother-in-law Emanuel Downing complained, "I do not see how we can thrive until we get a stock of slaves sufficient to do all our business." Further south, in New Amsterdam, slaves built Wall Street's wall and cleared what became Harlem and Route 1. When a new shipload of slaves proved insufficiently hardy, Director General Peter Stuyvesant expressed his displeasure to the Dutch West India Company, insisting that the company supply the best slaves to Christian and company enterprises, while unloading the feeble on

"Spaniards and unbelieving Jews."

For much of the 17th and 18th centuries, New York boasted the largest urban slave population in mainland North America. Slaves made up one-fifth the population. And white New Yorkers lived in terror of slave revolt. An alleged 1741 plot led to the jailing and torture of scores of slaves, 30 of whom were executed, 17 by burning at the stake.

For slaves, the Revolutionary War was a liberating experience—but only if they fought for the British, who promised them freedom. Though George Washington sought to reclaim the colonists' slaves,

Complicity: How the North Promoted, Prolonged and Profited from Slavery, by Anne Farrow, Joel Lang and Jenifer Frank, Ballantine Books, 273 pages, \$25.95

Slavery in New York Ira Berlin and Leslie M. Harris, editors, The New Press, 403 pages, \$25

[art space]



This Is Beautiful is a photo and multimedia documentary project that showcases the innate beauty of all women. It creates dialogue about women's bodies, beauty and the lack of realistic images of women in media, a critical factor in the rise of eating disorders and distorted body image. The project empowers participants and viewers alike, injecting their environment with positive energy. It has exhibited throughout the Northwest and western Canada.

Amanda Koster launched *This Is Beautiful* in 2001: "I work in the media and wanted to contribute images that I think are beautiful, to show the beauty in every body and that our beauty belongs solely to us." The photographs, which have won countless international awards, will appear in the upcoming movie "Beauty Mark." Amanda is currently accepting proposals for exhibitions and from publishers for the book. To learn more about Amanda and *This Is Beautiful*, visit www.thisisbeautiful.org or www.amandakoster.com.

British General Guy Carleton oversaw the evacuation of more than 3,000 black Loyalists, who fled New York for Nova Scotia and other British outposts.

New York slowly and reluctantly abolished slavery; federal census figures showed slaves in the state until 1850. But the death of slavery in New York scarcely impeded the city's business in the slave trade. In the peak years of 1859 and 1860, two slave ships bound for Africa left New York harbor every month. Although the trade was technically illegal, no one cared: A slave bought for \$50 in Africa could be sold for \$1,000 in Cuba, a profit margin so high that loss of slave life was easily absorbed. For every hundred slaves purchased in Africa, perhaps 48 survived the trip to the New World. By the end of the voyage, the ships that held the packed, shackled and naked human cargo were so filthy that it was cheaper to burn some vessels than decontaminate them.

Law-abiding Northerners made money off slavery through the cotton trade. "King Cotton" was to antebellum America what oil is to the Middle East. Whole New England textile cities sprang up to manufacture cloth from cotton picked and processed by millions of slaves. In 1861, the United States produced more than 2 billion pounds of cotton, exporting much of it to Great Britain via New York.

No wonder then that as the South began to talk secession, so too did New York Mayor Fernando Wood, who proposed that Manhattan become an independent island nation, its cotton trade intact.

How do we reconcile these facts with our mythology of the Civil War and our convenient conviction that the evils of slavery were contained within the South? Obviously, we can't. Slavery was such a huge and gruesome enterprise, supported by so many, that it explodes inflated notions of American character. Instead, we might appropriately draw parallels between antebellum America and Nazi Germany.

This is not to assert that ordinary Americans were "evil," but rather that our insistent sorting of the world into "good guys" and "evildoers" distorts reality. Today, pro-

gressives are justly suspicious of the high-flown "freedom" rhetoric our government deploys to advance American empire. But we need always to be skeptical of reductive, righteous narratives. Far from promoting morality, such fictions allow us to hide our worst impulses from ourselves.

—Phyllis Eckhaus

HUMOR

TV of the Future

Although reality has been nipping at the heels of satire for many years, reality has increasingly been overtaking satire. I thought of a TV show called "Feng Shui Vigilantes," only to find out there are already similar series, such as "While You Were Out." So here I am, trying to extrapolate on industry trends in order to forecast programs of the future, while simultaneously hoping that none of them will be on the air by the time you read this.

"Tips for Terrorists"—This is a spin-off of those segments on the news, originally intended to inform American citizens about the plethora of vulnerabilities in our infrastructure. However, intelligence agents learned that international terrorists were busy taking notes, ever vigilant for weaknesses in this, their target country. When the first episode is

aired—disclosing the lack of security at the nine dams scattered around Los Angeles—it will be attacked as stretching the First Amendment too far, but defended as the risk of democracy.

"The Gay Mafia"—This series, "The Sopranos" meets "Will and Grace," has an all-gay cast.

The doubly-stereotypical gang extorts interior decorators and runs gay bathhouses. Soft-core-porn scenes with bumping buttocks occur each episode. Limp wrists are in, stiff dicks are out. Dialogue ("Who moved my soap opera?") and T-shirts ("It's OK to Be Hetero") serve as cute condiments.

"Pot Party"—An ongoing reality show for those who find themselves smoking marijuana alone, but feel more gregarious to at least see fellow stoners on the screen passing joints around the room, talking,

laughing, listening to music and munching the hours away.

"The D Files"—D, of course, is for disinformation. Ever since the Bush administration announced that there would be an Office of Disinformation—and then, as its first official act, the Office of Disinformation announced that there would not be an Office of Disinformation after all—folks have been wondering what they're clandestinely up to. This game show provides the answers, as contestants attempt to distinguish between facts and propaganda.

"Celebrity Enemas"—Executives at the Fox network will readily admit that it was a real challenge to develop this particular series. "It was important," according to one spokesperson, "that this program be presented in a tasteful manner." At first agents and publicists alike refused to return calls from segment producers. But when John Goodman agreed to participate in the pilot, then other celebs started volunteering. "I'm on a special diet," the portly actor stated—"low salt and high colonics." The program is sponsored by Starbucks to help promote their new coffee enema, the Anal Latte.

"The Reality Café"—Viewers will find this documentary series truly riveting, what with the ups and downs of a posh specialty restaurant which serves only those items that have been eaten by contestants on shows such as Fear Factor. The menu includes grubs, worms, huge hissing cockroaches, rancid cheese teeming with maggots, rat stew, reindeer testicles and horse rectums.

"Godspin"—Every Sunday morning, representatives from a variety of religions—including cult leaders and professional skeptics—will discuss spiritual matters in a lively fashion. Such topics as the following will be explored: "Does the Deity Have an Awareness of Itself?" "Can Blasphemy Be a Form of Prayer?" "What Motivates Suicide Bombers?" "Should 'Under God' in the Pledge of Allegiance Be Changed to 'Inside God'?" And, "Did Jesus Masturbate or Did He Merely Have Nocturnal Emissions?"

"Law and Frivolity"—Courtroom dramas of plaintiffs suing TV networks for forcing them to waste time, forgo reading, and remain poorly informed.

This article was adapted from One Hand Jerking: Reports from an Investigative Satirist, by Paul Krassner (Seven Stories Press).

—Paul Krassner



MUSIC

Country's Jingoistic Jingles

Country music is the nation's most popular genre—with nearly twice as many stations devoted to it than any other—and perhaps its most political. These days, the jingle jangle jingoism from Music Row seems to only be getting louder.

Consider these lyrics from a few recent chart-toppers:

- "Some say this country's just out looking for a fight / After 9/11 man, I'd have to say that's right."
- "You can stay behind or you can get out of the way / But our troops take out the garbage for the good old U.S.A."
- "You'll be sorry that you messed with the U.S. of A / 'Cause we'll put a boot in your ass, it's the American way."

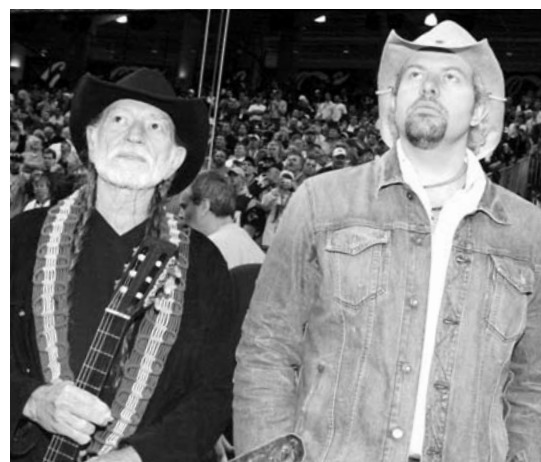
Subtle they ain't. Whatever you think of the work of Daryl Worley, Clint Black and Toby Keith, they have plenty to tell us about the state of the union. We may not always like what we hear, but as Chris Willman suggests in *Rednecks & Blu-*

enecks, country music is "a window into every aspect of lower- and middle-class life, the civic by no means excluded."

You can't spell Grand Ole Opry without the G-O-P. But country hasn't always been the official soundtrack of the Republican Party. Back in 1964—when Democrats still held 22 of 26 Senate seats in the South—Lawton Williams even cracked the country Top 40 with a song called "Everything's OK on the LBJ." Of course, that was also the year of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution.

Since then the South's political polarity has completely reversed: By 2004, Republicans filled 22 of the 26 southern Senate slots. The impact of the "Southern strategy" has been as bad for music as politics. Willman notes that in a genre that once spoke directly to the working class, "You don't hear many songs ... anymore about the bottom rung."

Rednecks & Bluenecks is no polemic; it's more of a breezy tour of the country landscape that reads like *Entertainment Weekly* (where Willman is a senior editor). Willman interviews nearly everyone who's anyone in country music, from Merle Haggard and Loretta Lynn to cur-



Willie Nelson and Toby Keith

rent superstars like Ronnie Dunn—who offers a bizarre sermon on the dangers of Wahhabism—and alt-country icon Buddy Miller. A better music critic than political analyst, Willman still has his insightful moments.

He describes President Bush as "the ultimate hat act," a scion of the establishment made over into a brush-clearin' good-ol'-boy. As alt-country gadfly Robbie Fulks once put it: "You went to Ando-

spin cycle

BY JESSICA CLARK AND TRACY VAN SLYKE

Whither the News?

Have we reached the end of journalism as we know it?

In early December, as news broke that the Bush administration was placing pro-war stories in the Iraqi press, the Tribune Company announced a round of deep staff cuts at several major newspapers. In response, MoveOn Media Action launched a localized petition drive, criticizing the company for abandoning "its responsibility to deliver strong watchdog journalism to the public" and then hand-delivered 45,000 signatures to the company's CEO.

But staff cuts are just a small part of the picture, writes Michael Massing in a two-part series in the *New York Review of Books* (www.nybooks.com).

Massing, a contributing editor at the *Columbia Journalism Review*, takes readers on a tour of the monomaniacal world of right-wing punditry, a strident force that has "contributed to a siege mentality among journalists." Cowed by corporate owners, readers screaming "bias" and their own class interests, journalists have betrayed themselves, he writes. "Of all the internal problems confronting the press, the reluctance to venture into politically sensitive matters, to report disturbing truths that might unsettle and provoke, remains by far the most troubling."

Media 2.0

As traditional journalism falters, a shake-up in media

distribution methods and changes in consumption patterns is forcing media makers to look to new models. According to "The Making of the New Powers That Be," a report from the progressive think tank New Politics Institute (NPI), these shifts will radically transform political communication.

"Anyone with any connection to politics needs to pay close attention to the changes taking place in the media world today," writes NPI fellow Peter Leyden. "If you change the way you reach audiences and consumers, then it changes the way you reach citizens and voters too."

NPI claims that this transformation is based on several large-scale societal shifts, including the rise of new

distribution channels such as high-bandwidth Internet, the emergence of cheaper technologies that allow people to create their own media, and the displacement of the Boomers by the rising "Millennial Generation." Widespread access to high-speed video and audio in particular will force media outlets, advertisers and corporations to rethink traditional text-based content as audiences come to expect "interactive, on demand, tailored media." The report is available at the NPI Web site (www.ndnpac.org/npi).

ver / What's the banjo fer?"

Such incongruity doesn't faze the Nashville cognoscenti. "Country singers talk about [Bush] in nearly the same terms that their fans talk about them," Willman writes. "As somebody who is larger than life and yet simultaneously approachable, who doesn't put on the airs that he clearly has rights to."

But not everyone in the South is on the bandwagon. "I'd say to Travis Tritt and Lee Ann Womack and the rest of 'em that the one thing they better understand is that their core constituency is getting fucked out here," says Dave "Mudcat" Saunders, a political consultant who's trying to help Democrats reconnect with Red state voters. "In job loss, health care, everywhere you look, rural America's getting screwed."

Mudcat, though, is having a hard time finding musicians to spread his message: Nobody in Nashville wants to be the next Natalie Maines.

The downfall of the Dixie Chicks is the watershed moment of *Rednecks & Bluenecks*. On March 10, 2003—just days before the invasion of Iraq—lead singer Maines told a London audience she was "ashamed" that Bush hailed from her home state of Texas. At the time, the Chicks were the top act in country music, and their album *Home* was the top U.S. album in any genre, with more than 6 million copies already sold.

But once Maines' quip hit the Internet, the Republican noise machine went nuts. Talk radio hosts and right-wing Web sites urged their minions to demand that lo-

Rednecks & Bluenecks: The Politics of Country Music, by Chris Willman, New Press, 302 pages, \$25.95

cal stations take the Dixie Chicks off the air. Citing the "public outcry," Cox and Cumulus quickly issued a directive to local programmers not to play the band on their hundreds of stations; Clear Channel "advised" its 1,200 affiliates to "pay attention to their listeners." Before long, DJs were holding events where listeners could throw their old albums in a bonfire or run them over with a tractor.

Blacklisting the Chicks was an easy way for the media behemoths—run by some of Bush's biggest financial backers—to demonstrate their patriotism on

excerpt



LIST ITEM:

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Available at eBay.co.uk from Dec. 7–13, 2005 for purchase by personal cheque, postal order or banker's draft.

the eve of the war. But the Chicks are still feeling the aftershocks. Two years after the incident, *Home* hadn't yet moved 7 million copies, and the band was reinventing itself as a pop act. For the rest of the industry, the message was clear: Shut up if you want to sing.

The censoring of the Dixie Chicks was only the most extreme example of how media consolidation is killing country music. The Telecom Act of 1996—which abolished nationwide radio ownership caps and spawned the mega-chains—further constricted already limited playlists, abolished local programmers and imposed a homogenized, cookie-cutter sound to better court suburban soccer moms (which admittedly served the Dixie Chicks well for a while).

This "brought home in a graphic way how profoundly one piece of legislation can affect our world," says Bob Tittle, a former manager of Brooks & Dunn, who helped found a group called Music Row Democrats.

Fortunately, there is another side of Nashville, where performers are carry-

ing on a "discordant duet" with the music factories down the road. Unlikely to get airplay anyway, liberal politics and old melodies mingle freely among the alt-country crowd, offering a ray of hope that progressive values and pedal steel aren't totally incompatible.

Unfortunately, the protest music of these "Bluenecks" is often just as shrill as that of the right. With a few exceptions—like Steve Earle's "Home to Houston" or James McMurry's "We Can't Make It Here"—the topical songs too often feel like novelty records, no less ephemeral than reactionary ditties like Ray Stevens' "Osama Yo' Mama (You in a Heap o' Trouble Boy)."

Grant Alden, editor of the alt-country bible *No Depression*, tells Willman "there isn't very much lasting art to be created by addressing current events—some, but not much." I hate to agree, especially since the antiwar movement could use a little twang. But by the end of *Rednecks & Bluenecks*, I was longing for a day when troubadours like Earle could go back to singing about outlaws, infidelity and trains.

—Craig Aaron

BY TERRY ALLEN

Hello, You've Got Smallpox

"Armed with a fake e-mail address, a would-be bioterrorist could probably order the building blocks of a deadly biological weapon online and receive them by post within weeks," reports the Nov. 12 *New Scientist* magazine. A skilled geneticist with access to a university-level lab could then use the DNA to create Ebola, smallpox, the 1918 flu, or other potential bioweapons.

"Currently, there is no law that says that a U.S. company can't make the genome for smallpox and send it to anyone," geneticist Michael Stebbins of the Federation of American Scientists told *In These Times*.

More than a dozen biotech companies make up the new field of commercial gene synthesis. Customers can order complete genomes or, to lessen suspicion, can buy partial genomes from different companies and construct the DNA themselves.

DNA synthesis is part threat, part promise. It can mean cheap and widely available drugs synthesized from rare plants. It can also provide valuable—albeit potentially dangerous—research material. In 2002 Eckard Wimmer made live, infectious polio viruses from scratch using synthetic DNA. And this year, in an astonishing breakthrough, scientists recreated the flu virus that killed 50 million people in the great 1918 pandemic.

That virus is made up of eight genes. Five of those—harvested from the lungs of a doughboy who died during World War I—have been available for a while. The remaining three segments were discovered in the disinterred corpse of an Inuit woman buried for nearly a century in permafrost. Scientists working to regenerate the flu hope the complete DNA will help them protect against lethal new strains, including the H5N1 avian flu.

The genetic code of the 1918 flu they deciphered is now available on the Internet. Sale is legal and monitoring is lax. Of 12 firms that *New Scientist* queried, only five screened every sequence requested; four screened some, and three admitted to not screening any at all. In addition,

some Western firms may be outsourcing DNA production to countries with cheap labor, including China.

Asked if he could make the 1918 flu virus, Stebbins said, "Yeah, absolutely. Once you have the DNA and the right equipment, it is very, very easy."

Giving up the ghost

You just left the clinic, pills in hand. Odds are your doctor chose them based on slick ads and the word of the perky drug company reps, or relied on research papers presented at professional conferences and in medical journals. Which source would you prefer?

Turns out, there may be little difference: The authors' names at the top of that research article confirming the safety and efficacy of your pills may be no more genuine than a drug rep's smile. Oh, the prestigious docs with the alphabet credentials and the string of affiliations really did sign the article. They just didn't write—or perhaps even read—it. A quiet industry of ghostwriters is churning out custom research for pharmaceutical companies that the London *Guardian* estimates comprises "almost half of all articles published in journals."

"In order to reduce your workload to a minimum, we have had our ghostwriter produce a first draft based on your published work. I attach it here," a drug company rep e-mailed Dr. David Healy, according to the *Guardian*. When the British researcher investigating the possible dangers of anti-depressants suggested revisions, the drug company replied that he had omitted "commercially important" points. The original paper ended up at the conference—under another doctor's name. These ghostwritten pieces "are no more than infomercials paid for by drug firms," Healy said.

Ghostwriting works like this: Pharma hires a medical education and communications company (MECC) to write the articles, pays academic physicians to sign



them, and then places them in medical journals. According to a report by the nonprofit Hastings Center, "Some academics simply sign ghostwritten articles, while others work from a draft supplied by the company. Sticklers for honesty merely take the money and write the articles themselves."

A lawsuit against Zoloft manufacturer Pfizer turned up articles produced by the company's medical communications agency, Current Medical Directions. In place of authors' names, the articles bore the notation "TBD," assumed to mean "to be determined." Hastings reported that between 1998 and 2000, 55 of 96 articles on Zoloft originated at Current Medical Directions, and—surprise, surprise—they painted a "happier profile of Zoloft than did the traditionally authored articles."

Many docs are also happier. "Perhaps I can get you to write all my papers for me!" gushed Richard Atkinson of the University of Wisconsin in a letter to Excerpta Medica, which handled the ghostwriting of his article on Wyeth's Fen-phen weight-control regimen, according to the *Dallas Morning News*. In 1997, the FDA recommended withdrawing the drug after it was linked to heart and neurological problems, some of which lead to death.

Turns out the "ghost" in ghostwriting may be you. ■

classified

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Christmas

Continued from back page

cousins hosted 70 people in her home in the days after the hurricane.

Now, life means close quarters, small irritations and long hugs with too many memories of home. Evacuees send e-mails to each other with Christmas poetry wistful for beignets, king cakes and burgers at Port of Call. People who lived for their front porches and pecan trees are getting used to seeing a clear, cold night sky.

Like children making their wish lists to Santa, the evacuees are hoping hard and wondering if they will ever regain shelter, sanity and a decent future.

The Christmas commerce that exists in the welcoming malls of the North is a harsh contrast to the stores and hotels of New Orleans, that were boarded up for protection and to keep out Katrina's homeless. People joke about spending food stamps on Christmas candy or presents or seafood for gumbo, and the reasons not to hoard instant noodles and canned goods. The suddenly indigent now recognize the delicate balance between entitlement and nutrition.

The jokes these days are edgy. Once voting for governor was a choice between the Klansman and the Crook.

(Vote for the Crook, my folks advised everyone.) Now, the joke is "Where's Waldo?," with bank officers and city and government officials hard to find.

Best friends and neighbors whose family connections extend for generations now meet fleetingly before traveling to jobs in one city or another. Relatives lose precious phone numbers and castigate themselves for doing everything wrong. Those who escaped Katrina have not escaped worry and longing.

Going home for the holidays are mostly the elderly and infirm. Their homecomings take place in downtown New Orleans at one of the three St. Louis cemeteries, which hold some of the city's most permanent residents.

Still, the survivors talk openly to strangers in crowded meeting halls. People with dedication and sympathetic hearts are working and planning. As in New Orleans' early days, crooks and futurists are finding commonalities in notions of a new frontier. Individuals are washing their houses by cup and spoon. They are teaching their children that kindness is sharing a bottle of water and self-sufficiency is keeping some.

When the nation emerges from its pile of gifts on Christmas morning and



Christmas Post-Katrina

picks up the newspaper or moves to the television, will Americans still attend to the people of New Orleans? Or will Katrina's poor folk move back toward the invisibility where they existed for so many years? The people of south Louisiana may accept their lot or maybe disappointments will fester. Let us hope that they bear no bitterness if America moves on.

In poor Louisiana, the community of Katrina survivors is looking for miracles. At this time of the year, they are finding a parallel to their tragedy and hardship from long ago: There was no room at the inn for the first Christmas and few places to rest their heads now for the people of New Orleans. ■

FATIMA SHAIK is the author of four books set in Louisiana and a former reporter for the New Orleans Times-Picayune. She currently teaches at Saint Peter's College and is completing a non-fiction book about the Societe d'Economie, a black benevolent association that worked in her neighborhood for more than 100 years.

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MENACHEM KAHANA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Christmas in New Orleans

By Fatima Shaik

PICTURE SANTA'S SLED with a rolling kitchenette attached and you have some idea about the size of a FEMA trailer. I came across a yard of them when I got lost on the highway near Baton Rouge, where most of my family evacuated out of New Orleans.

The trailers are not the double-wides I imagined—but some are festooned with lights and an artificial Christmas tree outside the door as in a Bobbie Ann Mason short story. A FEMA trailer is more like a camper that you'd attach with a hitch to your four-wheeler when you want to get out of the city for the weekend. Tiny, but nonetheless a gift.

As the rest of the country, children and adults alike, envision Christmas with piles of presents from their favorite electronic and clothing stores, the people of the Katrina diaspora are waking up daily with thoughts of clean underwear, one comfortable chair and not being home for the holidays. But they are trying to make it.

In the town of Baker, the trailers sit row after incalculable row on a dusty field isolated from the sleepy community. Baker is a town where Main Street sits along the railroad tracks and leads from the interstate past the chemical plant and the playground to the church and two roads named Magnolia. An estimated 1,700 people live on the Baker plain. It is a good mile from any shopping or familiar community life. The FEMA park is named Renaissance Village, for the RVs as much as the hopes of their occupants.

Other evacuees stay in temporary apartments and pile into houses around Baton Rouge. One of my

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